The Shooting Times and Country Magazine—August 12, 1955

THE BIRD IN THE HEATHER

by Henry Fletcher

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-THIRD YEAR FRIDAY, AUGUST 12th, 1955 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

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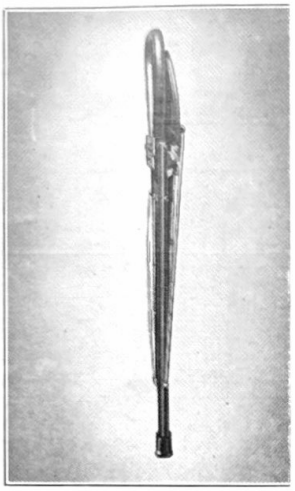

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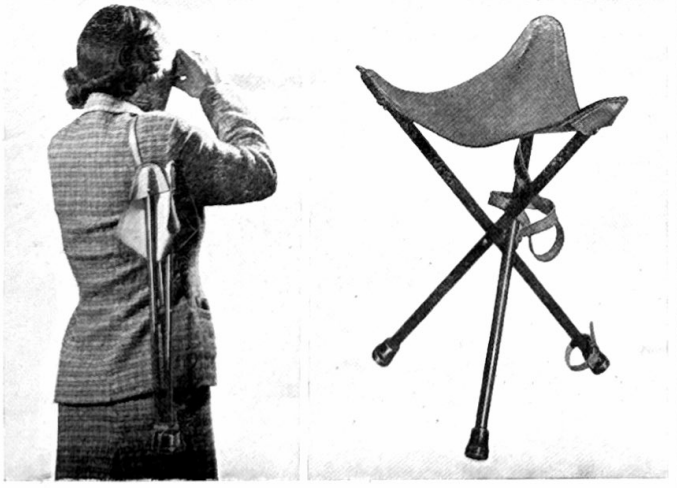

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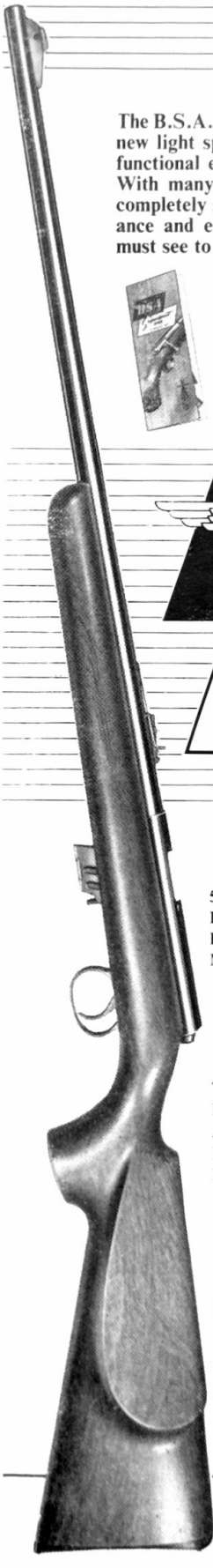

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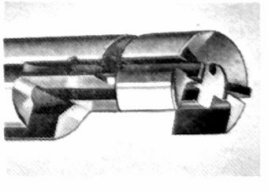

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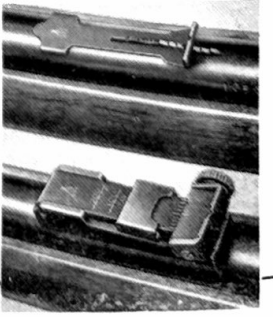

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

MANY shooting men of great experience, first-class shots and leading sportsmen, have never shot a grouse—our native game bird. Many indeed have never even seen a *live* grouse. These are facts which the complete layman may find difficult to assimilate, though their explanation is probably quite a simple one. However this may be, everyone looks upon the Twelfth not only as the opening day of the season (that long-anticipated season) but as a kind of traditional milestone in the sporting calendar. For the glory and fame of August 12 have literally spread to the ends of the earth!

Comparisons are usually odious and certainly no attempt will be made here to compare grouse shooting with any other kind of shooting. In any event the conditions and circumstances of grouse shooting are so unique that no useful purpose would surely be served. But it should be said that grouse shooting possesses a distinct "flavour" of its own, which is no doubt responsible for its attraction of shooting men from all over the world. Indeed, there is some "taste" about the sport (as there is of the bird when properly cooked) which places it above and beyond criticism. It may or may not be difficult to shoot—the point is the conditions of its shooting are in a class by themselves.

Much water has now flowed under the bridges since August 12, 1915 (forty years ago) when on the Littledale and Abbeystead moors in Lancashire eight guns killed 2,929 grouse. And it may be doubted whether bags of such magnitude will ever be made again. But no justification exists for saying that those days were superior to the present, when good bags, if not of that class, are still made on the leading moors. It is a very long time, too, since the late Lord Walsingham (in fact, considerably longer) made his record bag of grouse of 1,070 on his Blubberhouses Moor on August 30, 1888. But beyond the fact of the great numbers of birds it cannot be said that the quality of the sport has suffered today. There could scarcely be improvement—but surely continuity counts for much.

This very day there will be many a cheerful lunch party on the moors, at which will be present young and old, those who are new to the game and those who perhaps have not missed a Twelfth in 50 years. And doubtless the usual post-mortems will be heard, the "if onlys" which even the best shots may relate. There will be many a pleasant scene and the best picnic lunch of the season. Reunions too there will surely be.

The immediate gastronomic effect of all this will be manifested in the fashionable hotels, clubs and restaurants, whose aim it will be to include roast grouse on the menu of the *earliest possible meal*. And the *bon viveurs* will vie with one another in their desire to sample the first succulent mouthful. Indeed the elaborate arrangements which are made of express delivery—not only in this country, but in America and other places abroad—constitute a romance of their own. Surely the grouse is a very important bird! Our good wishes go out to all readers who are shooting the grouse today.

* * *

GROUSE PROSPECTS

On Page 518 of this issue will be found a brief survey of some of the grouse shooting prospects in Scotland. We have received a number of accounts of other districts, and have studied reports of grouse moors in Scotland, England, and Wales. And, having done so, it seems that, generally speaking, the prospects for the season may be summed up as follows. Weather seriously affected the welfare of grouse during recent past breeding seasons, and, last season, most moors were accordingly shot over lightly and a fair to reasonably good breeding stock of birds was left. Hard weather in the north last spring undoubtedly did some damage on the higher moors, and, while a number of small, and a number of backward, coveys can be expected, especially on high ground, there have been very few reports of disease or heather troubles, though water has been scarce on some of the higher, drier moors. It would seem, therefore, that, taking the moors by and large, there is room for neither pessimism nor undue optimism, and that the key note, so far as grouse shooting prospects are concerned, must be "reasonable hope."

HUMBER WILDFOWL REFUGE

Plans are announced for an experimental wildfowl refuge on the Humber—the first in the country under the Protection of Birds Act, 1954. The Nature Conservancy, following discussions with representatives of wildfowling and conservation, and with the Humber Conservancy Board, whose co-operation makes the refuge possible, have made recommendations to the Home Secretary, who having consulted his advisory committee on the Protection of Birds Act, is giving notice of a proposed order under the Act. The refuge extends over some 20 square miles of tidal flats and water between Brough and Trent Falls. Its main purpose is to protect the main Humber roosting area of the pink-footed goose as a means of building up the wintering flocks to larger numbers. The draft scheme provides for all shooting and access other than in the course of navigation to be prohibited in the refuge throughout the open season between September 1 and February 20, and anyone committing an offence would be liable to special penalties under the 1954 Act. A local joint committee consisting of representatives of naturalists' and wildfowlers' organisations will supervise the administration of the refuge and under the scheme a warden would be appointed by the Nature Conservancy to watch the area and to make observations and reports on numbers of wildfowl. This is the first proposal in Great Britain for a statutory refuge with the support and participation of wildfowlers as well as of naturalists, and it is hoped that the experience of operating it will prove of more than local importance.

FEATHERS

To the trout fisherman feathers mean flies, and only those varieties that play their part in the dressings of exotic patterns of artificial flies are of interest to him. The fly-tyer who collects rather than buys his feathers haunts aviaries wherever they are to be found, and news of a three-year-old cock by some miracle still left alive may send him on a long and sometimes abortive journey. There has been correspondence in *The Times* recently about the difficulty or impossibility of buying feathers for pipe cleaning, and various alternatives have been suggested, many of them connected with the holiday task of collecting gulls' feathers. One fact emerged which may not be generally known. A correspondent wrote: "As feathers can now be sold at £29 a ton for agricultural purposes such as manuring hops, it is not worth the while of chicken farmers to trouble about the small demand there is for the use of these for pipe cleaners."

LITTER-FIENDS

The New Hampshire Legislature has passed a law which it hopes will result in keeping the Granite State's lakes, ponds, and streams clean and beautiful, the Wildlife Management Institute reports. The law provides that any person found throwing refuse into public waters or land bordering the waters may lose his fishing and hunting license for the current year. Properly enforced, this might deter thoughtless shooters and fishermen. But why discriminate? There are many polluters of public waters, roadsides, and scenic areas who neither hunt nor fish. And in the British Isles, while many anglers are inconsiderate as regards the litter question (one has only to view the banks after their departure) it is the non-sporting public who are chronic litter-fiends.

NEW BRUNSWICK PARTRIDGES

The inhabitants of New Brunswick are largely descended from British stock, and it looks as if they have inherited their ancestors' love of the partridge and are determined to have a better supply of them. At Saint John, the local branch of the New Brunswick Fish and Game Association have made arrangements to release in the early fall of this year, 500 birds which will be deposited in carefully selected spots throughout the province. Next year their field men will make a tour of exploration and report if the birds have successfully survived and are nesting.

ROYAL WARRANT APPOINTMENTS

The supplement to the *London Gazette* (July 12) contains a list of the Royal Warrants of Appointments to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. We note that John Rigby and Co. have been appointed rifle makers, and that Messrs. James Purdey and Messrs. Gallyon and Sons, Ltd., have been appointed cartridge makers to Her Majesty.

In Retrospect

by Tower-Bird

IS there a duck shooter today (this very day) whose mind has not returned to August 12 of last year, when he shared with those who shoot the red grouse, all the pleasurable anticipations which go with the opening date of a new shooting season? Shared them for the last time.

For those of us who get good duck shooting inland, the new opening date, September 1, means the loss of almost three weeks of what *can* be first-rate sport; it also means, for most of us, that we must now sit still and watch the gradual vanishing of the majority of our home-bred mallard, in spite of all the hours we have put in attempting to safeguard their nesting and rearing periods. Speaking for myself, I have spent long hours two days a week killing crows and other vermin which destroy scores of duck nests on our local marshes; and, apart from those two days, I put in an hour or so at sunrise and sunset doing the same thing. There are certain other protective measures I take to preserve nests, and, up to this year, I have always "fed" one or two flight ponds regularly, so that I could be assured of a few young mallard during August.

It is a co-incidence that while it would be a waste of time to feed-in some of these ponds now August shooting is no longer with us, the main food which I used is also no longer with us, for I used to kill a considerable number of rabbits the paunches of which were slung into my ponds. While I may yet "look after" one or two good flighting pools, in the hope that some duck will stay with us till September, there are others which I would sooner run my dog through regularly than feed-in, for I know that, despite the new Act, there will be a fair amount of duck shooting during August, and that certain persons will be sure to shoot certain pools, though with a sharp eye open on an escape line. Not only will a number of youths, who shoot duck and anything else all the year round, kill a number of immature mallard during August, hunting flappers among the reeds with dogs and shooting fliers when no one is about, but there are plenty of old countrymen and coastal gunners who resent interference with what they consider the "rightful law" and who have always shot, and will continue to shoot duck (until caught and fined) from August 1 to March 1. Much of this sort of thing, however, will gradually be stopped by the activities of those attached to wildfowling clubs and associations.

August Duck Flighting

I, myself, was bitterly opposed (in spite of compromise) to the opening date of duck shooting being changed to September 1. For, while I acknowledge that there are immature duck about during August (as there are immature grouse in that month, or immature partridges in September), it surely behoves the good sportsman not to shoot such birds, but to concentrate on those plenty of strong-winged birds which flight in to the pools at dusk, or come from afar on to the barley stubbles in small, and not infrequently very large "flocks." While I will give place to no man in my love for autumn and winter fowling, I have found great joy, and also great sport, in duck flighting in August. Now, as I say, those of us who have looked after the nesting duck well, must sit back and see them go before September—vanish to the large open waters of private lakes and to the coast itself.

But enough of this pessimism, for sure enough there will be at least *some* duck hanging round the marshes inland during September, and when, later, the floods spreads across our marshes, and wigeon in their thousand and mallard and teal in their hundreds come inland, I feel that among them, and probably *showing them the way*, will be our lost August duck, now fully-grown and wilder after weeks of experience on the coast and elsewhere. Also, when the barley stubbles lie open during early September, I know that flocks of hundreds of mallard will flight to them from private lakes and from the coast. That is all very well for land-owners and farmers on whose ground the stubbles lie, and for some of us who find little difficulty in getting permission to shoot there, but countless "small" shooters will be forced to wait many weeks before they can get a proper "crack" at the duck.

My old friend Alan Savory, with a couple of duck he shot on August 12, 1954.

However, there are compensations; for there should be plenty of pigeon shooting in the vicinity of laid corn and elsewhere—sport which is of great mutual benefit, for it is an aid to agriculture and first-rate shooting practice.

Acting, Unpaid Pests Officer

As I have said before in my articles, I am considered acting, unpaid Pests Officer for the village, and particularly for two large allotments, in one of which lies my own well-tended plot. During the past month, I have shot about 30 pigeon, five jays, several magpies (apart from crows, rooks, and jackdaws), and caught many moles—all round and about the two allotments. And, let it be recorded, I am increasingly touched by various forms of gratitude shown to me by allotment-holders and local people. Although I grow my own vegetables, I often find a basket of peas, young carrots, early beans, and other delicacies placed anonymously on my doorstep, for it is widely known that I refuse to accept any "gratuity" for my vermin killing efforts.

Last night, for instance, a man ran after me, puffing and panting, to the top of a steep hill overlooking one allotment. He had looked out of his window on hearing me shoot a pigeon in his garden at first light, and he had just found among his recently-dead father's belongings two cartridges. He knew nothing at all about such things, he admitted, but, if they were of any use to me, he would be very glad if I would accept them. I thanked him very much for his trouble and nice thought. The cartridges were, in fact, a No. 6 trap-shooting one, and one several years old. Both were coloured with age. I was surprised, therefore, on trying them in the gun, after I had taken up my usual ambush among a tangle of tall branches, to find that they dropped into the chamber with a pleasant "plop." I waited for a quarter-of-an-hour, then fired the trap-shooting one into the air, for this is my usual method at this spot of scaring any pigeon within hearing out of the trees, or off their nests, when I usually get a shot or two as they fly round.

An Unfortunate Shot

A few evenings ago, I was much amused by a rather different kind of gift left on my doorstep, for I found four empty pea-pods which had obviously been opened by jays. I took the hint at once and went to a certain corner of one allotments where I knew I had left one particularly artful jay, and waited for an hour and a half for it to arrive. To my consternation, two finally flew into an oak tree a 100 yards away, and for some time I watched them through the telescope. They flew and fluttered about the outside foliage and I could see them filling themselves with caterpillars which were stripping the leaf. Then one flew down to a row of peas and back and I did a stalk through high nettles (being stung the while by the nettles and many insects), and finally got under the oak. The jays were somewere above me in the thick foliage, and, after ten minutes, I saw a movement in the leaves overhead. When I shot quickly, however, the two jays fled from the tree, and a blackbird came tumbling through the branches!

Yesterday morning, I was returning with two pigeon I had shot in a private garden, when I saw a pigeon fly up from my own allotments, cross low over my cottage, and settle in a low oak. Before I had reached my gate, the bird left the oak and flew down again on to my brussels—or so I thought. I hurried down with the gun, but could see no sign of the pigeon. Guessing that it must be in a tree 50 yards away, I clapped my hands, when out it flew with a large twig in its beak, and I had an easy approaching shot. That'll larn pigeon to nest on my own doorstep, as it were!

One day last week I was chatting with a policeman, when he asked suddenly: "What are you going to shoot this winter?"

I think that I must have registered a look of surprise, for he continued: "Haven't you heard about the new law they've made; all wild birds are now protected."

"All?" I queried.

"Well," said he, "perhaps not all, but most of them."

"Crikey," said I, "I must find out about this . . ."

Still, it's nice to know that at least one policeman is aware that some sort of new bird Act has been made! And I was grateful to him for the kindly remarks he made about my grand dog, and the way he patted and fussed it—without even noticing the fact that, as usual, Don was not wearing a collar.

Grouse can give sport in surroundings of panoramic loveliness.

The Bird in the Heather

by Henry Fletcher

AS the Twelfth approaches, there is only one bird in the thoughts of the sportsman, the gourmet—and yes, even in the mind of the man in the street—the red grouse.

The grouse could not enjoy this popularity and retain it so consistently, if it were not deserved. Its eminence must rest on a solid foundation. And yet, if I had been asked which of all our game birds was my favourite, I think I should have put the partridge at the head of the list. For not only does this bird give most excellent shooting, weaving and twisting as it tops the hedge in front of us, but it appeals to our sentiment also. For no species excels the partridge in the care with which both sexes tend their young, nor in the bravery with which they defend them in moments of danger.

Then, too, partridges are the denizens of our own home fields; we see them again and again; we come to recognise individual coveys, and we idenntify them with just those few acres they make their own particular province. They are so close to us, that somehow they seem to be almost a part of our lives.

But in spite of all this, and possibly owing to the unfortunate falling off there has been in the supply of partridges, I am wavering in this allegiance, and feel more and more inclined to give priority to the grouse. One cannot wonder, indeed then, that the northerner, who knows little of the partridge manors of the south of England, should describe the grouse as the finest bird that flies.

And he can make a good case, too, for *Lagopus Scoticus,* the bird of his choice. First of all it is indigenous, and, in spite of attempts to introduce it elsewhere, it only really flourishes in Britain. It is the most truly native bird we have, and also, I believe, in sheer numbers, it exceeds any other game bird in this country—probably with pheasants as runners-up.

First To Come Into Season

Another strong point in favour of the grouse is that it is the first to come into season. It provides first-class shooting, whether walked-up, shot over dogs, or driven over a line of butts. And it can, provided the weather is favourable, give sport under delightful conditions, and often in surroundings of panoramic loveliness.

Probably there are few people who appreciate the extent of the moors which carry grouse in these islands. From Derbyshire and Yorkshire northwards to the Border, and also in North Wales, there are vast stretches of moorland, all of it, wherever there is heather, suitable for grouse. There is a big expanse of heather-producing bog and some high ground in the north-west corner of Ireland also. But Scotland is far ahead of her neighbours, and has a higher proportion of her total area suitable for grouse than any of them. No wonder the Scot gives pre-eminence to this bird above all others, or that about three-quarters of all the grouse that find their way to the London market come from Scotland.

There are some, no doubt, who remember the annual exodus which used to take place from Euston and Kings Cross in the early days of August, and the holiday spirit which animated these travellers journeying to the north to try conclusions with the red grouse on its native heath, and in the lonely environment in which they live. In order to do so, many of them put up with the accommodation which was to be found in some rather bleak building on the edge of a lonely moor, euphemistically described as a shooting lodge, and only inhabited at this time of the year. This was because these moors were so far from civilisation, that the transport then available could not cover the distance which separated them from more comfortable quarters, and allow time for a day's shooting as well.

Gaunt and Forlorn-Looking Lodges

Some of these shooting lodges were just dumped down by the roadside where they were best suited as a shooting centre. There they stood, without garden or any amenity, gaunt and forlorn against a background of hills and heather, looking as much out of place as the proverbial "lodge in a garden of cucumbers."

But, in contrast to this, many shooting parties assembled then, as they do still, in some delightful country house, where the fortunate guests enjoyed every amenity, as well as the sport provided by their host. I remember being in one such country house before the turn of the century, when I was about thirteen, and the son of the house a year younger, and what a good time we had. The house was full of guests, many of them old friends of ours. There was boating, bathing and fishing in a beautiful tree-surrounded lake in the grounds; also tennis and picnics, and, above all, an occasional invitation to join the guns on the moor. It was on one of these occasions that a kindly sportsman lent me his gun, and I shot a driven grouse at my first attempt; a fact which makes me wonder why I have missed them so frequently with my own gun ever since.

The country house where the shooting party assembled.

Amongst all the guests there was one, a judge, whose attitude towards us was quite different from that of the others. Whether he was a county court judge, or a judge of the High Court, I cannot say; but if pomposity were any criterion, he ought to have been a star of the first magnitude in the judicial firmament. The judge never spoke to either of us; he ignored us so completely that we might

never have existed, and, of course, we resented this.

We were not long, however, in discovering that he was a very poor shot. Also he used a weapon adapted to take pin-fire cartridges. These were invented as an alternative to loading a gun by the muzzle, a slow process which had to be carried out each time a shot was fired. They had a brass pin about half an inch in length let in at the base, and a small opening was provided in the barrels, through which the pins projected. When the hammers were released, they struck the pins and the cartridges were discharged.

Advent of the Centre Fire Cartridge

I can remember being struck by the fearsome appearance of these cartridges in the judge's cartridge bag, each bristling with a pin, and wondering what would happen if someone dropped the bag or fell on it, or it was struck a blow accidentally. This invention might have had a long run, as it was undoubtedly an improvement upon muzzle-loading, but shortly afterwards the centre-fire cartridge came into being, and completely supplanted it. By this time the judge's gun was really obsolete.

Very soon kind chance enabled us to have our revenge for the slights the judge had passed upon us. It fell on a day when the ladies had come out in force to join the guns at lunch. The whole party was proceeding along a track over the moor, and the ground on each side of us was slightly higher than the path we were following. Suddenly I saw two grouse crossing the rise, and it was evident that they would fly over our heads. "Look, Judge," I cried, "two grouse, shoot!" The judge's gun should, of course, have been unloaded, but it was not. He put it to his shoulder, tried to get on to one of the birds, but failed to fire, and they flew over our heads. He swung round, fiddled with his gun, tried again to get on to one of them, and again failed to fire before they had disappeared from sight.

We were delighted; it was almost too good for words. He had made a fool of himself, not only in front of his fellow guns, but in the sight of the whole house party as well. They would know him for the rotten shot he was, and nothing the judge might do in the future could wound our *amour propre* in the slightest.

My young companion, Reginald Farrer, was destined before he died at a rather early age to become the best known botanist of his day, not only because of his special knowledge of rock plants, but also because of his travels in China and the Far East, whereby he discovered many plants previously unknown to science.

The internal combustion engine has wrought great changes in sport, and perhaps as much in grouse shooting as in any other. A gun can spend the night thirty or forty miles away from the moor, and yet arrive comfortably by car in time for the first drive, and return to base when all is over. Jeeps and Land Rovers can convey the guns and their impedimenta to or near to the firing line, so that those who are not physically strong can take part and arrive without distressing themselves unduly. A generation ago it was the case of impressing a farm horse into service or Shank's pony, with perhaps the night before in one of those rather inhospitable shooting lodges to which allusion has already been made. This revolution in transport has put considerable value on the out-of-the-way moor, for which it was hard enough to get a tenant thirty or forty years ago.

Grouse shooting is now so widespread that there must be hundreds of newcomers who take the field each year, and with them a proportion of others whose experience is limited. Every now and then one is horrified to read of some gun accident, some tragedy which in nearly every case could have been avoided by the observance of those safety precautions, which have been long established as the best means for preventing accidents.

The tree-surrounded lake—with boating, bathing and fishing.

In the case of driven grouse it is probably correct to say that four out of five grouse which come within shot of the butts are flying at shoulder-height at the time, or below it. Then again, grouse do not necessarily approach the guns at right angles to the line of butts, but often on a diagonal course. If the ground in front of a butt slopes either up or down, they may follow the trend of the ground either upwards or downwards, especially if they are in some way affected by the wind. It is therefore absolutely essential that a gun should have clearly fixed in his mind where the butts are situated on either side of him, and that he should on no account fire in any direction unless he is sure that he can do so without taking any risk whatever. The fact that so many of his shots are fired horizontally, should be a sufficient warning to any person of sense that a doubtful shot is a potentially dangerous one.

Keeping a Tally

If grouse are numerous, and the gun is shooting reasonably well, it is important for him to keep a count of the number of birds he has shot, and preferably how many have fallen in front, and how many behind the line. There is nothing much more exasperating than to be asked to help in finding the last one or two birds, when the person responsible has very little idea where to look for them.

If a bird falls some distance away, a line can be taken by some object beyond where it fell, and its position thus memorised. It may also be helpful to put one or more spent cartridges on the parapet to establish the direction in which other birds have fallen. It is surprising how often with such guidance a gun can walk to the exact spot where a bird is lying, and pick it up without the help of a dog at all.

Grouse shooting in any of its variable forms can be, and should be, a most enjoyable sport. This enjoyment can be enhanced or otherwise by the friendliness, good manners, and sense of responsibility evidenced by those who take part in it. The cheerful and socially-minded gun, who is even a moderate performer, is always welcome, with this unequivocal proviso, that he is considered, and appears to be a safe shot. There is nothing which is more certain to mar the enjoyment of the day, than a suspicion that one of the party is not safe. *Verbum sapientibus.*

The Last Twelfth

(Continued from opposite page)

confident, and I missed with the first barrel—one of those shots when you know you are behind as you press the trigger. I swung on to it again as it dipped away and was pleased to see it drop.

After gathering the birds, I set my face towards home. Remembering the snipe, I loaded with No. 7s and was rewarded with another that rose from the edge of the sewage farm just before I left the marsh. Truly, I felt that St. Hubert and Diana had joined in smiling on me that August morning. Seven birds with eight shots!

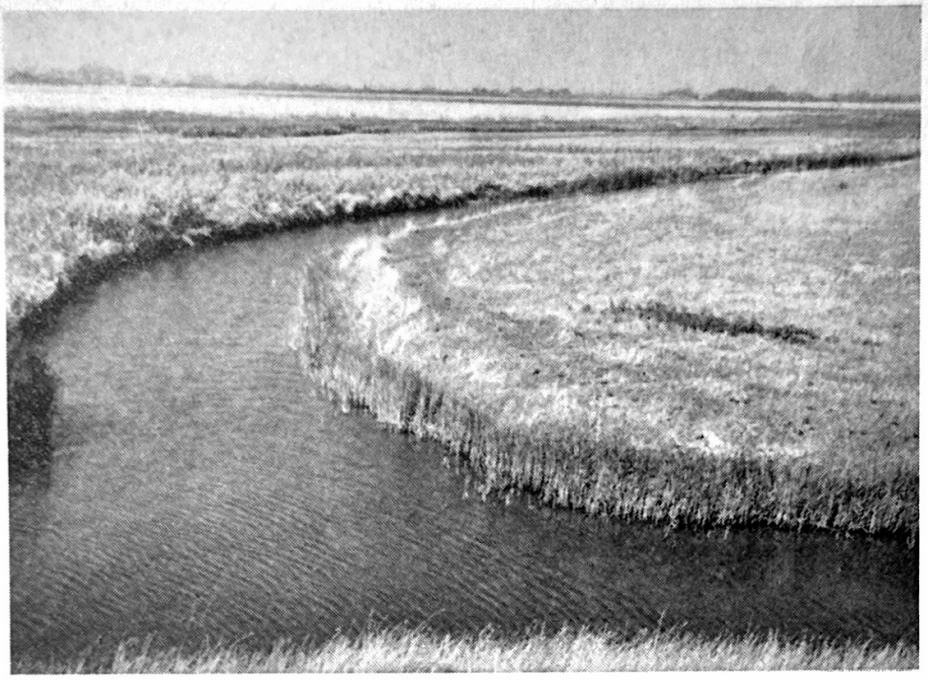
Dusk found Sally and I crouched by the rushy pond, where some 15 hours earlier we had thrown away one of the best chances of the day by failing to stalk carefully. Shots sounded far and near as the shrouds of night advanced from the east. A whisper of wings and five bodies swept overhead, high, but not too high, and a double shot brought a mallard tumbling down. A minute later shots from the top of the marsh told me the direction they had taken; they must have circled, as it was not long before four shadowy shapes came by again, lower this time, and another was killed. I stayed no longer. The light had almost gone, and, in any case, I felt that enough was as good as a feast. After all, it was the duck which had provided the sport and they deserved a rest.

Next morning I was on the marsh again at first light and had it all to myself. A thorough walking-up of the fleets in the lower two-thirds of the marsh revealed nothing except a snipe, which rose out of range. Farther up, a lone young drake, which I suspect was a pricked bird, rose from some reeds and offered an easy crossing shot. There was nothing else, except a dead bird which Sally found lying in a stagnant pool. It was rather an anti-climax, and I went home to breakfast without bothering to try the saltings.

However, that was on Friday the 13th, and it is of the last 12th about which I write—for me one to be long remembered.

UNPOPULAR OYSTER-CATCHERS

The food of the oyster-catcher, or sea-pie, consists mainly of molluscs, worms, and insects, and in several coastal districts there has been a certain amount of agitation to get this bird taken off the "protected" list. Latest complaints come from West Country inshore fishermen who say that oyster-catchers have increased so rapidly of late years that they are becoming a real menace by eating great quantities of small shell-fish. Incidentally, the normal number of eggs laid by this bird is three, though two, or four, are not infrequently found.



In late summer the saltings can look cool as the tide makes, but walking them up at low water can be arduous indeed.

The Last Twelfth

by D. E. Don

ONE thing which comes frequently to the mind of the wildfowler just now is the remembrance of his "Last 12th," for the 1954-55 fowling season was the last to start on August 12. Some of us may be lucky enough to travel north in August this year for grouse shooting, but the vast majority of shooting men will have to wait another three weeks before their sport begins. I will not attempt to go into the rights and wrongs of the matter, but, speaking for myself, I shall be sorry not to see another fowling twelfth—the last one being most memorable.

Some time before the season opened last year, I reconnoitred the fresh marsh and adjacent saltings where members of the wildfowling association to which I belong enjoy much of their sport. With binoculars and my bitch, Sally, I proceeded to the marsh after breakfast one morning. It was not a typical summer day—how many were last summer?—with a strong wind sending alternate periods of sunshine and cloud and at the same time waving the lush marsh grasses like a green sea. The long reeds in the fleets rustled and spoke to each other in reed talk while the wind-ruffled fleets reflected the sky in an even more broken condition than it really was.

I had walked up half the marsh without seeing anything unusual, and was feeling a little disappointed, so I sat down by the two gaunt elms that stand like sentinels on this otherwise treeless marsh and smoked a reflective cigarette while the occasional calls of redshank and curlew came to me from beyond the nearby sea-wall. A kestrel hung motionless over the lower end of the marsh, then swooped away into the low scrub and bushes that surround the small sewage farm there.

Succession of Surprises

I had not proceeded more than 30 yards from the elms when a teal sprang from the edge of a broad fleet where Sally was nosing about. To this pleasant surprise was added another, when snipe started rising at intervals and weaved their rapid way over the sea-wall.

It was when nearing the top (or western) end of the marsh that the most pleasant surprise of all took place—a family of eight mallard were flushed. Six of them were strong fliers, but two could do little better than clear the grass-tops and make their way to another narrower fleet than that from which they had been disturbed. I had seen enough. That the marsh had a population of some sort was the most important thing and it was not for me to disturb it unnecessarily.

As I left the place, I was determined to be the first person there on August 12.

An Early Start

At 3 a.m. on the promised day I rose, made tea, and 4 o'clock found Sally and I by the stile at the entrance to the marsh. It was still too dark to shoot. As soon as I considered it light enough, we set off, making a small dew-pond our first objective. While still 70 yards away, there was the sound of wings and several vague shapes disappeared into the gloom. I had grossly misjudged the observance of those August duck, and I also mentally kicked myself for not remembering another more concealed line of approach which would have taken me much nearer to the pond before having to show myself.

Thereon, until reaching the elms, my journey was uneventful. Looking back through the binoculars, I saw that three more guns had entered the marsh. Being on the left, or southern side, I decided to stay there and let the others work up on my right, hoping that anything they disturbed might cross in front of me on its way over the sea-wall. By some perverse chance there was nothing in the fleets I chose to walk up, and, although shots from the other guns told me they had been more fortunate, nothing flew my way.

On nearing the western end of the marsh, I heard a shot from the saltings over the sea-wall, and, being fairly close under it, I remained where I was. Seconds later a teal and two mallard came over and I got a right and left at the teal and the nearest mallard. Sally fetched the teal from the fleet where it fell, while I retrieved the mallard from the long grass where it lay dead, not fifteen yards from me. A right and left to start the season! Such a thing had never happened to me before and a wonderful feeling of achievement enveloped me.

Two of the other guns, both members of the same club (the third member had left to go to work) and I met shortly after this. They each had a mallard and said that there were three more down which they were unable to find. I felt proud of Sally when she located two of them—one in a narrow fleet which kept diving, and the other in a tussock of rough grass. The third she failed to find and I called her off when she became bored and began aimlessly chasing larks. My two companions then went home to breakfast.

Alone on the Marsh

Left to my own devices, I set off towards the two elms, where I intended eating my rations. On the way Sally flushed a snipe at 30 yards and I was lucky to get it with the No. 5 shot in my right barrel.

A breathless dawn had given away to a beautiful day—not a heavy, sultry August day, but one with a breeze that set the grasses nodding and the reeds whispering. It was good to be alive as I sat by those two old elms munching bacon sandwiches and drinking a bottle of beer. Curlew crying from over the sea-wall reminded me that the tide was making, and we stopped lazing in the sunshine and struck out on to the saltings, which lie to the south of the marsh. A mile off I could see a herd of curlew gathering before the rising water. When about midway between the sea-wall and the salting's-edge, I esconced myself and Sally in a small tributary creek that ran into a very much larger one.

Scanning the marsh with binoculars I noticed a single curlew flying up the edge of the saltings. While it was still some distance away, I gave it the normal double-noted call and followed it up with the bubbling feeding call. It turned, answering. After an interval, so as not to arouse his suspicions, I whistled again, then kept as low as possible until I saw it thirty yards away between the rim of the creek and the brim of my hat.

What occurred next all happened in a moment, and takes longer in the telling. I raised myself and fired at the bird I had been calling and it crashed into the saltings. A startled *cour-lee* made me glance round, and there was another bird, which had approached without my knowledge. Now, I am a left-handed shot, and this bird was on my left and to the rear. Therefore, I shifted the gun to my right shoulder, fired, and to my joy and surprise, brought off the second double kill of the day.

Here let me say that I lay no claim to ambidexterity, but while in the Army I always fired rapid with a rifle from my right shoulder and found little deterioration in my scores. A bren gun, too, has to be fired from the right shoulder, and I managed to become a marksman with that weapon. It was not until I came out of the Army that a famous shot at a certain shooting school told me I had "two master eyes." Firing a 12-bore at clays, I found that right-handed shooting came quite easily, and that I scored a reasonable number of kills, which probably accounts for that second curlew last August.

At the sound of the shots the main herd rose, and though most of them resettled again, several began to fly up the saltings. Keeping low, I waited, whistling every now and then, until one came within range. I suppose my shooting up-to-date had made me over-

(Continued on facing page, col. 3)

The Young Shot

Dog Days

by Petrel

I RETRACT. I take it all back. I even apologise for thinking such thoughts. I have been deluded and misinformed.

You will never get something for nothing, they said; well—you may get something, but it will not be anything worth having. I believed them, for certainly everything has always seemed to point this way, and I echoed their sentiments.

You know how it is. That piece of silver turns out to be plate after all, and that "rare" picture a print or a copy and nothing extraordinary. You know, too, the adverse psychological effect of advertising something cheap or posting a "free admission" notice.

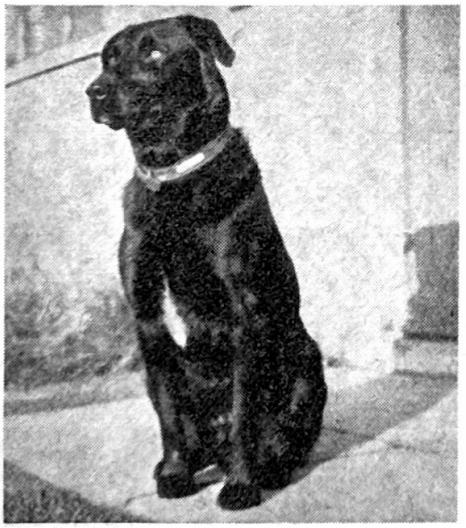
You seldom get any takers, which emphasises the inherent caution and suspicion of most people.

But it does not always work out that way as events have lately proved. It all depends, I suppose, on your sense of values.

In my short time I have owned my fair share of dogs of many different sorts: long dogs, short dogs, big ones, small ones, high-breds and hybrids, but discounting a dalmatian which pointed partridges like a champion and ran in quicker than Brown Jack, only three of them have been really any good as gundogs.

First of the Few

First there was Nigger, whose name has already passed briefly into history in an earlier mention on this page. Large, black and expensive, he joined me at a moment when enthu-



Nigger. Of sinister antecedents, but always a gentleman.

siasm and inexperience got the better of my bank balance as a tried and tested labrador of eighteen months. No pedigree came with him, and indeed any chart of ancestry might have spoilt the sale, for his bar sinister proclaimed itself in a wide, white blaze upon his chest, and a tail which he flew high and dry like an ensign from his stern. For all his doubtful forbears, he was a gentleman in every respect and could teach his better-bred shooting companions a trick or two. His "proof test" took place on a pouring, squally day amongst the bogs and barren acres of a Durham shoot and he in his oily, double coat was the only one dry at the end as we shot snipe and duck and true wild pheasants in the swamps and reeds and runnels. I can see him now, pointing a drain that ran beneath the road, through which the winter rains were diverted to the low ground, and on being encouraged digging, not at the drain itself, but so as to form a dam against the flow. As the water level in the pipe rose, there was a splashing, scuttling sound, and a very wet rabbit bolted straight into the soft and swiftly snatching mouth of the excavator. Alas, after only one season's meritorous service he succumbed to pneumonia following suddenly on a bout of distemper which was almost cured, and died beneath my bed in the early hours.

A Typical Teuton

Next there was Arno, a German short-haired pointer, who came to hand, but very rarely to heel, during the brief but glorious sporting era of the Occupation. A typical Teuton of the old school, he combined all the qualities of his former master, being vulgar, greedy, blustering and bumptious, but at the same time utterly fearless, tireless and undefeatable on land or in the water. For all his size and energy he was easy to feed, and the simplest recipe was to take one hare—and hares thereabouts were as common as rabbits used to be hereabouts—paunch it and boil it up, skin and all, until done, whereupon Arno would devour the lot, skin and bones, in record eating contest time. Those German hares were big ones, and nine-pounders were common, but even so, on more than one occasion the gourmand would fly the mess windowsill during dinner in search of a savoury.

When I first took command (someone shoot that mocking-bird!) he resembled some Elizabethan courtier. His upper eyelids drooped abnormally, impeding his vision, and the local vet had made a good job of the operation which drew these upper lids tighter, away from the eyes. The green ruff which he wore on a wire around his neck prevented him from scratching out the stitches with his paws.

As a result, his vision was unimpaired, which is more than one could say for his hearing which seemed to fail at will as soon as he ranged a little too far ahead. As already mentioned, it was only a toot on a horn "borrowed" in the heat of a moment of leave from a Belgian tram conductor, that would bring him to his senses—a method no doubt employed by his former master, a hunting horn toting forester.

A big, strong dog, he needed plenty of exercise and loved nothing better than to accompany the horses, a considerable comfort to a less athletic master. But controlling a wilful hound and a headstrong horse at the same time is a labour that would have taxed Hercules, and when one day I rode to watch a squadron football match and discovered early in the game that Arno was missing from my side I sensed trouble immediately. Nor was it long materialising, for a deep baying from a nearby covert proclaimed that the game was afoot, and before a fascinated audience that hell-hound drove from her fastness a roe doe which he pulled down on the second circuit of the pitch.

The day before I left for home he was missing again and on my return from the distant field cashier I thought that I recognised him travelling in the opposite direction, supercilious and important as usual, on the front seat of a jeep beside an officer of another regiment. I found out later that I was right. He had found a new and comfortable home and moved in as soon as he realised I was leaving.

Now there is Kerry, certainly the best of the three and without any doubt at all the best bargain!

"I want to give him away to a good home," said his previous owner. He is two, trained, inoculated, has a good nose and loves water. *But* I fear he is not 100% steady, and three times has run in or "sloped off" at pheasant drives. Nor is he house-trained, and I like a dog that lives in." Now G.B. is a man who loves and lives for his sport and he does a great deal of covert shooting on a big scale. Naturally, under such conditions a dog must be nigh perfect, and if at all unreliable can only be an embarrassment at times, whereas in my sort of rough shooting and fowling, slight unsteadiness may make all the difference between a lost and gathered bird.

I went to see the hound without delay.

"He's in pretty hard order," said G.B. He's a bit poor, said I to myself, and he did not look

Kerry, on a hot day. Much more like the real thing.

his age. But he did look useful and had a wise and gentle face.

I brought him home, and he settled down as though he had always belonged.

More Than Something

Since then, a month ago, I report, especially for his late owner's benefit, that he has had his share of pigeon shooting and has never put a foot wrong; has three times the appetite as a result of a worming dose, a course of Metatone, and exercise and much swimming; has a gloss on his coat and much more energy; is hygienically impeccable in house and kennel; and as a result of a concentrated "experience" course, is no trouble at all in traffic or indeed any environment and has lost his particular fear of dustmen and sudden movements behind him.

In short, I think I have got more than something here, and I congratulate you G.B. on your training, and thank you for your handsome gift.

If progress continues at this rate I have a feeling that K.D. will turn out to be as steady as that Russian timber wolf which graces your porch.

There's only one thing. You can't have him back!

A USEFUL CATALOGUE FOR THE GARDENER

The latest catalogue issued by Messrs. Carters Tested Seeds Ltd. of Raynes Park, London, S.W.20, is entitled "Bulbs and Lawns—1955"; it covers, however, a much larger field than the title suggests, with price lists of trees, shrubs, flower seeds, and with garden accessories also included.

With simply worded hints, and adequate illustrations, on the cultivation of bulbs, both in and outdoors, this book will be more than useful to all gardening enthusiasts.

"Bulbs and Lawns—1955" is available, free of charge, on request, from Messrs. Carters Ltd.

The pannier pony goes home with a load of grouse.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

ACCORDING to modern English usage, the word "moor" evokes in our minds a picture of undulating miles of heather; but if we consider the Lowland Scottish equivalent "muir" and the Gaelic "muir," which denote respectively moorland and the sea, we begin to understand that our "moor" is not all that it seems to be. An etymological dictionary suggests that it and the German "meer," a sea; the French "mer," a sea; the English "mere" a lake; the Breton "mor," a sea, and many other similar words in various European languages, all had their origin in some Indogermaniac word which signified a waste, and therefore the boundary of human settlements. No doubt, inhospitable moors would be in prehistoric times, almost as much of a barrier as the watery wastes around our coasts to the free movement of human populations.

The main stepping-stone down the ages for this idea was the Latin "mare," which we still preserve in its original form in Weston-super-Mare; and it is a matter of interest that people in some parts of eastern Scotland pronounce "moor" or "muir" as "mare" at the present time. Others a little farther north are inclined to say "meer" in the same connection. In the dialect of Kincardineshire (my own county) "moor" is invariably pronounced something like "more" or "mo-er." In passing, I must point out that the dual significance if the word is quite evident in moorcock and moorhen. One is the bird of the heaths; the other belongs to the meres.

Individuality of Moors

However, this fundamental resemblance in the minds of the ancients between wastes of land and sea is unlikely to carry much weight with shooting men of today. Far from being a horrid wilderness to them each moor has an individuality. It may be what a lay reporter once euphemistically described as a "heathery lawn of Yorkshire"; it may be a Welsh or a Lakeland plateau; it may be a steep mountainside of Scotland; it may be big or small; and it may be heathery or mainly covered with bent, botanically known as *juncus squarrosus.* In short, a moor can have many characteristics for those who are able to appreciate them. and these characteristics are interesting, because they decide the status of the moor as a sporting property.

For instance, the very big moor adjoining other preserved moors is practically certain to warrant the employment of several keepers solely on grouse production. A property of this sort is a moor in the full sporting sense of the term. It gives the maximum of everything. The bags are big, the shooting is first-class, and a whole conventional season can be spent delightfully within its boundaries. From this pinnacle of perfection, which is occupied by comparatively few moors, the others descend in well-recognised grades until they reach the bottom level that is represented by those barely-preserved properties with meagre bags and no organised shooting. Nevertheless, those very small moors are not without allurement in August.

Introduction to Grouse Shooting

My introduction to grouse shooting was, in fact, staged on a little moor between Inverbervie and Laurencekirk, which seldom saw a keeper because it straggled away from the main part of a low ground shoot where a few hundreds of pheasants were reared by the headkeeper and myself. It simply was not worth special attention; so just before the Twelfth I was detailed to take a census of the coveys; then on the morning of the great day we hied ourselves away to the uplands in a "machine" driven by the head forester who was probably pleased to have such an unofficial holiday. The shooters were the headkeeper and one or perhaps two young and active guests. I was porter, dog-man and beater combined. It is doubtful whether any fashionable team on the farther side of the Howe of the Mearns, that is, on Glen Dye, Gannochy, or Milden, enjoyed themselves better than our small party operating within sight of the North Sea.

A year or two later I attended small shoots on Rossie Moor and Montreathmont Moor in north Angus. The guest of honour during my first foray on Rossie was the then ambassador to Portugal, who was not hitting the rising grouse well. It was a dull day and he excused himself by saying that he came from a bright country and could therefore not detect his birds very clearly against the background of dark heather; which was quite understandable. Even experienced shooters have this difficulty often, particularly when grouse are approaching butts below the level of the skyline.

Montreathmont was in a category by itself. It is a comparatively level moor among the arable lands, and was partly covered with conifer trees of varying ages when I knew it. Nowadays it is a State forest. So we had always the chance of a mixed bag, of which the most prized item was an occasional capercaillie. This moor must have been a heathery semi-forest for at least a hundred years; for old chronicles tell us that Sir James Carnegie, grandfather of the Earl of Southesk whom I served, killed roe-deer there in fair numbers. In recent years roe have figured prominently in Montreathmont bags, I understand; so history is repeating itself.

A Moorland Fire

One of my most vivid memories of this moor concerns a fire which broke out one evening (probably as the result of somebody's gross carelessness) at the end farthest from the keeper's house at Red Den. Before a score or so of the estate staff could be mustered and rushed to the scene of operations the fire had burned part of a young plantation. All that night my mates and I had to patrol the blackened area to guard against a fresh outbreak. And this precaution was not superfluous. With every light puff of wind the smouldering peat broke again into flames, which had to be quenched with water carried in buckets from weedy ditches. We were indeed a weary lot of keepers and foresters when relief came about breakfast-time the following morning. This minor disaster occurred in midsummer, and I have no doubt that game suffered severely from its effects. But a fire is unlikely to get very far now on Montreathmont Moor. The Commission have a watch tower in action near Kinnell cross-roads.

As I have already hinted, those small moors of my earlier days were mere appendages of low ground estates; so the headkeepers concerned did not have that hectic time which is the lot of exclusively moorland men from the Twelfth onwards until the lodges are again empty, except for their caretakers. It is perhaps more correct to say that the moorland headkeeper's worries begin to increase before the Twelfth; for a great amount of planning is done before a shot is fired. But after the season begins, further planning is augmented by practical work; and only very capable men can keep the grouse shooting organisation running smoothly.

On the bigger moors guests depart and arrive, as a rule, every week after the Twelfth, and the headkeeper has to receive their shooting tackle into the gunroom, and delegate a loader to look into it, unless it is already in charge of a visiting loader. At the same time he has to state the approximate number of cartridges necessary for each day's shoot; and that is not always an easy matter. If the head is a long way out in his estimate, he will let himself down; but he is better to err on the generous side. I cannot imagine anything more calculated to spoil an outing on the moors than a famine of cartridges half-way through the afternoon,

Meanwhile the poor headkeeper's brain will be buzzing with thoughts of drivers and their disposition according to the wind which happens to be blowing on the morning of each shoot; with thoughts of ponies for elderly shooters; with thoughts of game hampers; with thoughts of presents which have to be packed up and despatched in time to catch the post; with thoughts of game for the cook's larder; with thoughts of men who can best be spared to pick up on the days following the

(Continued on next page, col. 3)

Sport Beyond Compare

by Coombe Richards

IN August, 1904, a great bag of 2,748 grouse (made on Broomhead Moor, only eight miles from Sheffield) caused considerable comment in the American Press. Overzealous but uninformed writers complaining of English "sportsmen," talked of their crude and brutal mentality butchering thousands of tame birds which, so it was inferred, were shot by guns "sitting in blinds"! Since those days, many American sportsmen have been over

The mid-day halt on a late September day on the moors.

and sampled for themselves this wonderful sport and have come to assess it at its true value.

Of all forms of organised shooting, the day on the grouse moor is, I think, away out in the lead. True, partridge, pheasant, wildfowl and in fact every type of shooting, holds its own particular appeal or fascination, but somehow those days "on the hill"—be they in England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales—are quite unbeatable. There is that "something" about them that is in a class on its own, and this applies perhaps especially to driven grouse. The entire evolution, and it is an evolution, is one of skill and interest and I sometimes wonder if all of those making their way to the butts fully appreciate just what has gone before to make the occasion possible.

One Particular Day

Let us, however, recall one particular day, the last one I spent—not on the Glorious Twelfth with summer mists smoking off the heather, but a late September shoot when birds flew that much better and the air up on the high tops was like cool, heady wine.

Our party of seven guns had mustered the evening before to be settled comfortably in various lodgings throughout the little grey-stone village straddling a fast-flowing stream in the valley; with the headkeeper's parlour for our mess and headquarters, and his good wife as an incomparable cook. Guns, cartridge magazines, and all incidentals were unpacked and made ready by bed-time and preparations completed for a 9 a.m. start next day, sleep perhaps in consequence being tardy in coming for thoughts of the morrow kept one awake. The whole atmosphere of the place was one of expectation and excitement; only the dogs seemed to settle down placidly.

What had been afoot long before, when in the "rig of the day" we assembled for breakfast and cars and shooting brakes clustering the street outside? The keepers had been up before dawn and out on the moor, and now whilst we set-to with a will upon a great dish of sizzling home-cured bacon and fried eggs, the company of beaters or drivers were already up there on the hills blanking-in and making ready the first drives. Ahead of them lay many more hours of tramping the heather, and how seemingly easy and effortless looks the real moorman's long, loping stride. They were, we knew, of all ages, sturdy boys to gnarled ancients—a grand, keen lot.

Sharp on the chimes of the church clock our host orders us away; second cups of coffee must be abandoned and that cigarette or pipe smoked in the car, and within minutes the convoy is winding its way up the rough and steep water-washed track leading across the moor and to the first line of butts; in this case not true butts but places marked by turf-cuttings topping an endless stone wall. To alight from the cars and fill one's lungs with the keen moorland air is a tonic itself; to gaze round the vast, undulating empty spaces is to feel puny and insignificant under the dome of a glorious cloud-flecked sky.

Dotted here and there in the heather are specks of white—the forms of sheep at graze—and at first it is easy to confuse their thin and far off baaing with the call of a grouse but soon one picks up the true sound; *puk-puk-ka-ka-kak-go-baack-go-baack,* as a few alert and suspicious old cock birds move restlessly about the moor. I know of no sound so enchanting or enthralling—no, not even the clamour of wild geese leaving the sands and coming in on the flight.

Only a Vast Silence

Soon each gun has taken position; the slight bustle and low-voiced conversation ends; only a vast silence—yet which is no silence at all if one's ears be attuned—covers the land. Maybe there will be a long wait ahead for the drive has a couple of miles to come and will not start until the guns are all up; and this period may well be occupied in viewing one's field of fire, in judging distances and estimating the flight angles and so on. There are few birds with more deceptive action than the grouse that has faced the music a time or two. After what seems an age, a line of tiny human forms appears far out in front, dwarfed and infinitessimal in the great open space. Is that the flutter of a white flag away there on the flank? Yes, it is indeed. Birds are now on the move and the ball about to open.

Suddenly—and although one is tensed for this very thing—quite unexpectedly, a faint crackle of shots sounds from the other end of the line, more like the splutter of a child's squibs than the reports of sporting guns, and a cluster of fast moving dots vanishes over the brow behind. Had those fellows up there been caught unawares, or had they connected with that first lot to come over? The distance is too far to tell, and anyway it is no time now for speculation or watching of others. A covey of brown shapes is winging towards us out of the distance. Looking about twice the size of partridges and appearing to be travelling at half the speed, those birds nevertheless hurtle up to and past us like so many dark bullets—one should have taken them half again as far out in front as one did.

Up and down the line now the sound of firing is an ever increasing crescendo; wisps of feathers float away down the breeze as pellets find their mark and bird after bird somersaults out of the covey and crashes to earth. Many fly on unscathed, but barrels get hot as the loaders pass through the recharged weapons and empty cases are scattered round them. All too soon the beaters are up and the gather begins. Seven out in front, three behind, and that runner down on the left. The dogs range thither and hither, but not too far behind, for that will come into a subsequent drive.

A British Sport of High Order

And so the day follows its course, maybe marred at the end by one of those thick mists which can so swiftly descend. At some drives the butts are within easy distance of the road; at others a long walk may be entailed—testing muscles and wind of those unaccustomed to foot-slogging and through thick heather at that. One's butt may be on the side of a hill so that birds appear as though by magic from a fold of the moor, or from round the side of a peat hag, to go sailing away over the glen—a sight which clings to the memory when much else is forgotten. Grouse shooting is full of drama and excitement; truly a British sport of high order. Its history, as shooting is now known, is a comparatively short one.

These birds have, of course, been killed, walked-up and shot over dogs, possibly ever since the invention of the sporting gun, but it is only since the introduction of the breech-loader and the coming of the railways and other swift transport that it has become the highly expensive and social sport as the last hundred years or so have seen it. More than likely it has now passed its peak and those days of great bags and armies of beaters have gone for ever.

Artificiality can, in the long run, spoil anything, and although wise preservation and care are rightly necessary, it is proper that nature should play a reasonable part in our sport. Grouse shooting is still an expensive pastime—despite much smaller bags, syndicates, and general present-day arrangements—for its undertaking. Nevertheless, I say this to any-

A little practice before the real thing—charging guns. Note the strapped cartridge bag.

one who has not yet savoured its joys. If the chance offers, grasp it—with both hands. Never mind the expense, the trouble, or anything else! It is an experience worth almost any sacrifice, and one which will fill the storehouse of memory for a lifetime and will never be regretted.

Round the Game Preserves

(Continued from previous page)

shoots; with thoughts of providing casual shooting for energetic guests on "off" days; with thoughts of displacing dud flankers without hurting their feelings; with thoughts of whether or not there will be enough dogs on the moor for each day, when a team is unexpectedly made up of guests without a dog among them. And so on. Undoubtedly it takes a capable man to keep the grouse shooting organisation running smoothly.

Gun Gossip

by North Country

CONTINUING my review of Messrs. Parker-Hale's catalogue, with reference to the 1914 war, as a Territorial Mr. Hale was called up for active service immediately on the outbreak of war, but in 1915 Mr. A. G. Parker died and the War Office shortly afterwards granted Mr. Hale's release to control the firm's war work. "It is now history how a woefully inadequate number of trained shots held the Germans at the Marne and in all probability prevented an attempt at invasion of this country."

This quotation from the history of the firm indicates the post-war problem which faced it: "The aftermath of the Geat War produced a feeling of revulsion towards arms, which was exploited to the full by pacifists, and for some years the rifle shooting movement was at a low ebb. So, too, were the fortunes of those who catered for it. During the war it had become necessary to acquire additional premises to deal with Government work; after the war the problem was whether to retrench or to try and hang on in the hope of trade improvement."

Mr. Hale took the latter decision and increased the firm's lines, and in 1924 his second son, Arthur, joined the business. In 1926 a family record was set up when Mr. Hale and his eldest two sons reached the King's Hundred at Bisley. This event was eclipsed two years later when Arthur (the present chairman of the firm) succeeded in winning the coveted prize itself. He was appointed a director of the company in the year of his achievement. Between 1926 and 1932 three more sons of Mr. Hale joined the business, each in turn working out his own position within the organisation, without favour. After the trade slump of 1930, there was a progressive restoration of trade from 1935 to 1939, including the small but increasing export business which had been built up. And then came the war with a fresh set of problems, war contract work and so on. This is what is said of the immediate post-war period: "The immediate post-war years can best be described as a period of frustrated opportunity. Markets abroad were wide open, but materials of all sorts were in short supply, and with protracted deliveries and higher prices the golden opportunity faded. Nevertheless, by keeping the home market short, the firm managed to increase the scope of its business abroad to an extent that since 1948 this has exceeded home trade by a useful margin."

In 1952 Mr. A. T. C. Hale, the head of the firm, died. He had seen the business grow from a small converted dwelling-house with two or three part-time family helpers to an establishment of some 150 employees and having world-wide trade connections. To him must go full credit for the hard spade work and drive needed to develop a business with roots deep enough to withstand the weather of trade depressions and to provide for future growth.

This catalogue is full of useful details as well as arms. It is known as *The Rifleman's Encyclopaedia.* Not that it refers only to the requirements of rifle shooters, as will be seen when some mention is made of its varied contents. It is in fact a shooting encyclopaedia and most useful, if not essential, to possess. For example, it includes sections on certificates and permits for firearms and ammunition, advice to applicants for firearms certificates, game and gun licences, shooting seasons, Sunday shooting in England, etc. There is, too, advice on choosing a rifle, an article on standards of rifle precision—before the list of rifles, pistols, guns, etc., commences. There is, in fact, an article on rook and rabbit shooting with a .22 by A. T. C. Hale.

A full description is given of each weapon, with illustrations (this publication runs to nearly 250 pages) and in the pistol section there is a short article on pistol shooting (holding, trigger pressing, etc). There is a lot about shot guns, a summary of the prepared statement on the new rules of proof, the memorandum on black powder guns, and specifications of a large number of guns. The boy and potential shot will be interested in the various air rifles and pistols listed—these weapons still fascinate me. Some pages, of course, are devoted to Parkerifling. These follow many pages on sights, telescopic sights, cartridges, accessories of all sorts, and I notice an excellent article on the care of personal weapons. I suggest that young shots and all who have the value of their guns and rifles at heart should study this article and abide by it!

As I pointed out, this publication deals with all kinds of arms and with very many shooting questions. In addition to its primary purpose, it is a very handy reference book covering, as it does, many of the queries to which an answer may be needed.

☆ ☆ ☆

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

Aug. 13: The London G.C. Members' Shoot.
Aug. 13: Lancashire Sporting Championship, Bowland and Dist. G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe.
Aug. 14: Warwickshire D.T.L. Championship Coventry & District Dog & Gun Club, Brandon Road, Binley, Coventry, 2 p.m. (Postponed from June 25.)
Aug. 17: Bowland and Dist. G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe. Evening practice.
Aug. 20: North Wales D.T.L. Championship, North Wales Gun Club, Rhosesmor.
Aug. 20: Leicestershire D.T.L. Championship, Deer's Leap G.C., Ashby-de-la-Zouch.
Aug. 21: Coventry & District Dog & Gun Club, Binley. Members' Shoot, 10.30 a.m.
Aug. 22: North of England Sporting Championship, Harrogate G.C., Yorks.

* * *

Reports and Results

The annual clay pigeon shoot of Fighting Cocks' Muzzle-loaders Club was held at Highfield Farm (by kind permission of Mr. J. Cowen). General conditions were that the shoot was open to members of affiliated wildfowling clubs and members of the Muzzle-loading Association. Also any others who were invited by the organisers. There were two events each of five birds, and the prize for the highest score out of 10 birds was the Canham Trophy, a magnificent silver cup generously given by Mr. Arthur Canham, a well-known small-bore shot. There were consolation prizes for second and third place.

Event No. 1 was off the Gatepost at 6, 4, 12, 9 and 6 o'clock (5 birds). There were no restrictions as to gun position, but only one barrel was allowed. Any bore was admitted, but the load had to conform to C.P.S.A. standard (2¼ di. and 1⅛oz. shot). Event No. 2 was Turn Table at 1, 3, 6, 9, 11 o'clock (5 birds) under the same conditions as Event No. 1. Both events took place in warm, sunny weather but there was a tricky cross wind which although it helped to keep spectators cool it also assisted the artful trapper, George Pallister, in putting up some tricky birds. Due to having to conform to C.P.S.A. standards, as stated above, most of the charcoal burners were 12-bores, although I did hear one wildfowler yearning for his 6-bore. Guns, every one of them, all showed the signs of loving care bestowed upon them and among others noted were two back actions one a double-barrel 12-bore by Mortimer, the other a single barrel by Braggs of London. Other makers whose products were performing faithfully were Boss Reilly and Manton, the latter gun being 10-bore. There was also a short barrelled gun 16-bore converted from flintlock to percussion by the drum nipple method, which although it bore no makers name, did full credit to both its maker and to its present owner, Bill Johnson.

The shoot was well attended and there was an entry of 29 guns. I am glad to say gun manners were uniformly high and I never experienced the feeling one gets when you look into the cannon's mouth. The guns performed very well inded, there being only one misfire during the events. This helped to convince those who were not already ardent muzzle-loaders that the old guns had a point or two that the others have not, and there were quite a few discreet enquiries as to how one became a muzzle-loading maniac, price of guns, etc. Everybody agreed that the shoot was a great success and it officially ended with the presentation of the Canham Trophy by the donor to the winner with long applause. Although officially ended, there followed "a shoot the rabbit" competition which tested every competitor's skill.

Awards were: Canham Trophy, 1, Mr. J. F. Brown, Piercebridge; 2, Mr. C. L. Eceles, Middlesbrough; 3, P. Hall, Middleton St. George. Prize-winners in shoot the rabbit were: Mr. A. Ward Thompson and Mr. W. Cruickshank.—W. Stanley.

Wildfowling Clubs

The Dorset Wildfowlers' Club met at the Horse and Groom, Wareham, for their monthly meeting. Gordon Mathews, our able secretary, reviewed the past month's activities. The main point was the re-introduction of *zos* grass to Poole Harbour. The Nature Conservancy were now helping in an advisory capacity, and surveying of the Harbour had definitely shown that *marina* was still there. Supplies of *zostera marina* were being investigated also *zostera nana,* for future planting later in the season.

The coming season would see all Dorset wildfowlers armed with their own Bird Census sheets so that local records could be colated. All were reminded that the wildfowl shooting season starts on September 1. Members were asked to do all they could to make this publicly known to local sportsmen not in the club.

The last club clay pigeon shoot had been attended by Mr. Spearing, a well-known shot and gunsmith. Members present had gained by this visit and the club offered their thanks to him. The treasurer's report was very satisfactory, funds growing each months, thanks to the effort of Mr. F. Burgess, a very keen member.

* * *

An Executive Committee meeting of The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland will be held at the Great Northern Hotel, Peterborough, on August 13. Lunch will be obtainable at the hotel: members are asked to arrive well before lunch.

* * *

The final shoot of the South Lincs. Wildfowlers' Club will be held on Sunday, August 28, and anyone interested will be made welcome. The shoot will be held at the Sailors' Home, Old Leeke, Boston, and will start at 10.30 a.m.

* * *

A reader (G.A.A.R) has sent us the following report culled from the *Eastern Daily Press:*

To conform with Norfolk County Council and Yarmouth Council, the East Suffolk General Purposes Committee decided at Ipswich to recommend the County Council to bar shooting on Breydon Water on Sundays. They are asking the Council to apply to the Secretary of State for an Order banning Sunday shooting in the county. Under the new Protection of Birds Act, no mention was made of Sunday shooting, explained the Deputy Clerk (Mr. P. Hutchison). Both the Norfolk and Yarmouth Councils had applied to the Secretary of State for these Orders and Breydon Water was also partly in both these Councils' areas. The Great Yarmouth and District Wildfowl Association were against the ban, pointing out that most of their members were working men whose only opportunity of shooting was on Sundays, he said. Clearly there was likely to be confusion if shooting was permitted on only one part of Breydon Water. Before the new Act, shooting had not been permitted in East Suffolk.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

PEST CONTROL AND PEST ANNIHILATION

Sir, — Due to the increasing emphasis placed on pest destruction during recent months, may I, as secretary of a shooting club very closely associated with pest control, express the opinion of a number of my fellow sportsmen.

The policies expounded by ministerial authorities make it quite clear that pest control is a thing of the past and pest annihilation is the order of the day. It now seems extremely likely that our future generations will be ignorant as to what a bird looks like, other than those which have an undoubted economic value, and a rabbit will only be seen in a zoo, for surely by some logic that as a rabbit eats grass etc., a pigeon eats crops, so will foxes consume poultry, rooks eat seeds, and blackbirds etc. despoil soft fruits, until even the humble sparrow be accused of some hideous crime and exterminated.

Are we so-called British sportsmen to allow our heritage and countryside to be abused in this manner, until it becomes so pitifully unrecognisable? All true sportsmen will undoubtedly say we are not, and I most earnestly request all who fall under the title "sportsmen," to cast aside any apathy which may exist and to put pen to paper and voice their cry.

It is the general opinion of a number of my club members that, if this maniacal policy is allowed to materialise to any extent, their resignations from my Club will be automatic, which will obviously point to the beginning of the end of a Club which, though inaugurated only 15 months ago, has built up a grand reputation for itself, and consequently all future work on pest destruction of any nature will cease forthwith. After all, we are all of us aware of the need for pest *control* and are prepared to work voluntarily to that end, but complete pest destruction is nothing but inhuman and idiotic.

B. STUART MORGAN,
Hon. Secretary, Newport and District Woodpigeon and Squirrel Club.
23 Heather Road, Newport, Mon.

ROUND THE GAME PRESERVES

Sir,—Many times are quotations from your excellent journal used as "bible truth" in the settlement of arguments, so I must add a little to the above article which appeared on July 22.

Whilst Mr. Imrie is obviously talking about Scotland, it should be pointed out that in England and Wales, Section A.(1) of the Slaughter of Animals Act, 1954 which came into force on October 1, 1954, extends the provisions of the 1933 Act (with regard to stunning) to all kinds of animals, and removes the requirement for a decision by the Local Authority on the slaughter of sheep.

Mr. Imrie opens an old sore — pole-axe versus humane killer, but tempers his statement with the words "*if the pole-axe is wielded by an expert.*" The use of this method by any inexperienced person used to result in far more cruelty and for a very much longer period whilst training than a novice with the humane killer. I have seen bullocks and pigs literally scalped by repeated blows by the pole-axe skidding off the skull, and as a Meat Inspector I am only too well aware of the effect of any rough treatment prior to slaughter on the keeping quality of the resultant meat.

I would add that the natural reaction of a free-range bullock is to object strenuously when roped, in the same way as an unbroken horse, whereas cows, generally speaking, may often be led quietly in (bulls also).

Finally I would like this letter to be taken not as a criticism of the article, but rather as an addendum to it.

A. W. EASTER,
Oxon.

BEECH TREES AND THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

Sir,—In Great Britain the Forestry Commission is planting far more beech than it did in the years between the Wars. Beech is a faster growing tree than some people imagine (heights of 60 feet may be achieved in 33 years), yet it is not normally mature or economically merchantable until 100/120 years old.

The prospects of beech in some parts of southern England are gravely prejudiced by the grey squirrel: beech, sycamore and ash are its favourite species for "barking" when in the young pole stage. Much of the beech in England is of poor quality, and it is important that the trees of the future should be grown from seed dropped by parents of good type, such as those in the photograph, taken in Slindon Park (National Trust) in West Sussex.

In no case should the past policy of "negative selection" be allowed to continue—that is, the felling of the better trees and the leaving of the poorer to regenerate. Anyone interested in growing beech in Britain will find much information in the Forestry Commission's "Studies on British Beech Woods" (12s. 6d., H.M.S.O.) prepared by the Commission's ecologist, J. M. B. Brown.

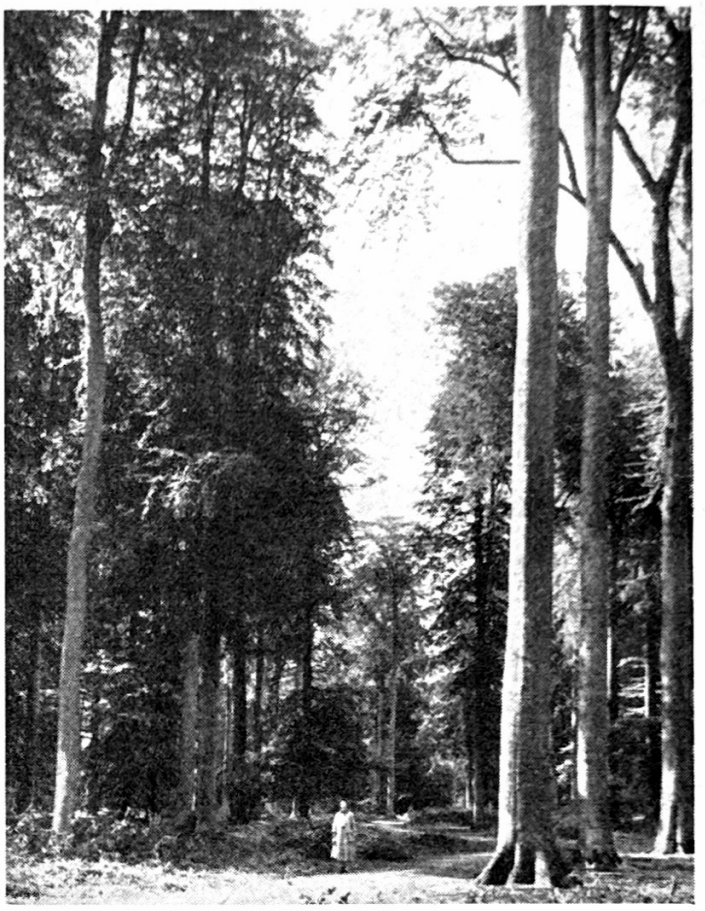
J.D.U.W.,
Somerset.

A TEST FOR SHOOTERS?

Sir,—I view with horror the suggestion that newcomers to shooting be taught by means of lecture courses held in London. I spent three years teaching the rudiments of air gunnery, pistol, and shotgun shooting to *keen* young air crew cadets, and I learnt that half-an-hour in a turret or on the range was worth six hours in the lecture room . . . and there is more to our sport than gun handling and the rights of others.

Since the War, I have tried to help nearly a score of townsmen (mostly candidates for my Squirrel Club) to use a gun and to learn something of the ethics of shooting and to absorb some country lore—but with little success on the whole. Most of them were good fellows, but dangerous nuisances with a gun in their hands. These beginners spoilt sport for the old hands, and yet could not be trusted on their own. Only one (a doctor) even tried to paunch a rabbit, and he drew the line at a gut-shot one. Typical comments were: "What does a beech tree look like?" and "Surely those little pellets could not hurt a man?" Two others distinguished themselves by shooting young pheasants from a binder in August, and another, when asked his bag at a rabbit drive, said: "Well none, actually, but I think I wounded quite a few."

I have now come to the conclusion that only the born and bred countryman fits happily into the shooting scene, and that the townsman (unless caught and trained when very young) is better off in the city where he belongs.



Beeches, about 220 years old, in Slindon Park, Sussex. Height about 110ft. (See letter "Beech Trees and The Forestry Commission.")

As you say, shooting is now almost a democratic sport, and there is already great pressure on shooting grounds and marshes. These areas are diminshed year by year by urban encroachment, etc., and the position will rapidly get worse if all and sundry are *encouraged* to join our ranks—the good and keen ones will find a way and they will be welcomed. I believe that the art of shooting (and this includes a great deal of country lore and woodcraft) can *only* be learnt by a long apprenticeship that starts at boyhood.

If "Certificates of Competence to Shoot" are to be worth anything then they should be issued by wildfowling clubs, gamekeepers, or responsible farmers *after* the candidate has demonstrated his trustworthiness *in the field*. He should also have read the "*S.T.*" for a year at least. I should like to hear a Ministry of Agriculture expert teaching the difference between a flying woodie and a homing pigeon in the lecture room.

There is something in the suggestion, but we old hands will prefer to choose our shooting guests from those who have learnt the hard way.

LESLEY R. JAMES,
Peaslake, Guildford.

[The old days when boys were taught to shoot under the strict surveyance of father, guardian, or an old sporting friend, and learned their game and vermin lore under the guidance of a keeper, belong, alas, to what has been described as the Golden Age of shooting. To-day, in order to safeguard the interests and future of our sport, "sport through strength of numbers" is very necessary—however unpalitable this fact may be to many. To-day, for instance, we are faced with the threat that the pigeon menace to agriculture may be dealt with by narcotics, yet such steps might be nipped in the bud if a sufficient number of reliable pigeon shooters (whom farmers and shoot owners and tenants could trust) really set about pigeon shooting over decoys in a big way. We see no reason why those forced to live in towns, or prefering to do so, should not learn the rudiments of Safety-First, gun-handling, etc., in the lecture room from experts in various branches, and then "complete the course" in what you term the hard way by experience in the field. Whether enthusiastic young would-be shooting men live in town or country, they deserve every encouragement from those of us who are more fortunately placed. Smug indifference, or discouragement, is neither sportsmanlike, nor helpful to the future of sport.—Ed.]

Sir,—I would like to record my appreciation of, and agreement with, the plan for a test for shooters (issue July 22). This would give every prospective shooting man a chance to learn all about the game and become a good sportsman.

I would be the loneliest man in London if I could not look forward to *The Shooting Times* each week. I read every word of it.

JOHN MCCOLL,
Harringay, N.4.

FLY TORMENT

Sir,—Referring to S.D.H.'s letter under the above heading (issue July 29), I have found Dimp cream an excellent anti-fly ointment for a dog. I use it myself when fishing, and always anoint my terrier as well.

H.W.T.,
Northampton.

NEW BOOKS

Kingdom Of The Elephant, by E. Temple-Perkins (Andrew Melrose, 18s.). "This is the story," writes Colonel Sir James L. Sleeman (himself a well-known big game hunter and photographer) in his Preface, "of one of the most experienced big game hunters that East Africa has ever produced; for who else can lay claim to have been in close contact with wild animal life for thirty-five years, and to be still permanently residing in their midst? . . . Many books have been written on the subject of big game hunting in East Africa, but none by anyone with equal experience . . ."

The author has spent over thirty years in the Colonial Administrative Service in E. Africa, and today is one of the most famous big game wardens in the world. He has been regarded in his time as one of the most daring and persistent hunters of big game. Today, he prefers hunting with a camera, and some of his photographs are among the 40 excellent ones which illustrate this book. (Incidentally, the author, apart from accounting for many aggressive elephants, lions and buffaloes in defence of African life and property, holds seven Uganda records).

Mr. Temple-Perkins, in spite of his past adventures, is now a good conservationist, and his philosophy and wisdom relating to the future of big game, are well worth profound thought. His first love is for elephants, and of these great creatures we learn a lot. For instance: "The trunk is not only the elephant's nose. It is also the continuation of the upper part of the mouth . . . The calf, however, does not suckle with his trunk, but drinks its mother's milk with its mouth." The period of gestation is eighteen to twenty-one months . . ." The chapters on elephants are packed with such facts of interesting but minor note, apart from far more absorbing features of the elephant's habits and characteristics, and countless vivid and exciting reminiscences of hunting rogues and damaging herds. "Once," says the author, "I saw a hippo follow two elephants wading in shallow water and bite at the tail of one of them. The owner looked angry and hurried on, but the hippo looked highly amused."

Although the book is, as I have said, packed with interesting facts which only a very, very close observer, with a deep and abiding knowledge and love of wild creatures could so clearly define, the work as a whole is a fine study, an up-to-date survey, of East African big game. It is well written, exciting, factual, and can be unreservedly classed among the best so far written on big game in the area covered.

Two Years in the Antarctic, by E. W. Kevin Walton (Lutterworth Press, 15s). The yearly departure of the survey ship John Biscoe receives increasing publicity in the Press and on the wireless, as also do the conflicting claims of Britain, Chile, and the Argentine to the area of Antarctica south of Cape Horn. This book is the first personal account of two years spent in that area of British Antarctica since the war.

The author went to the Antarctic as a member of the newly-formed Falkland Island Dependencies Survey which has been engaged in exploring the region. This is a record, among more serious reports of the work, of dangers and hardship; of an aircraft crashing seventy miles from its base; of organisation under difficulties; of the training of dog teams; of polar life in general. In a country where life itself may well depend upon the strength of a dog trace, or the weight of a ration box, there is yet a wildness and beauty, an isolation and close companionship which combine to explain the author's determination to return.

The book is very fully illustrated with first-rate photographs, taken during the survey.

On the Track of Prehistoric Man, by Herbert Kühn (Hutchinson, 21s.). One cannot resist the thought that the remanants at least of many of the natural hunting instincts which kept alive our remote ancestors, the prehistoric men, lie today in the more successful pursuers of wild game and fowl. There are still many tribes who hunt that they may survive, and even among civilised races the hunting instinct may be strong in those who really understand the minds of beast and bird and how best to bring them to book.

Our knowledge of prehistoric man has been very much extended in recent years, and such knowledge cannot fail to be fascinating to anyone with the least imagination. Discoveries have been made of the most astonishing examples of Ice-Age art—carvings, instruments, weapons, engravings, and, above all, the magnificent paintings which adorn the walls of some caverns in France and Spain.

Where exactly did Man become fully human? That question forms the subject-matter of this book. "My aim," says the author, "is to tell of the times when Man emerged from the darkness—before he was caught in the light of history: on the epochs that lie before tradition."

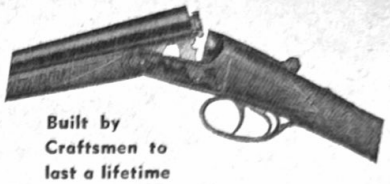
The book is splendidly illustrated with drawings and photographs (36 photographs, 4 of them in colour; 32 drawings; 13 diagrams, and 2 maps) —the best collection of their sort ever assembled in such a moderately priced volume.

The Wild White Stallion, by Albert Lamorisse (Putnam, 8s. 6d.). In the south, where the great river Rhône runs down to the sea, there is a wide, empty land called the Camargue. In that land live herds of wild horses. White Crest was a proud and fearsome stallion, and was the leader of one of those herds. One day, some men made up their minds to take him. So began the story of White Crest's struggle with man. This story Albert Lamorisse made into a film called "Crin-Blanc," and this well-produced book is made up of full-page, three-quarters-page, and half-page most impressive photographs reproduced from the film, with explanatory text by the author and D. Colomb de Daunant.

Fox Terriers, by J. H. Pardoe (Ernest Benn, 8s. 6d.). Edited by S. M. Lampson, this is one of the soundest books on the breed. Fully illustrated, it includes a commentary on the evolution of the fox terrier from the earliest records of its origin. The science of selective breeding for the show bench is discussed, and there are photographs of the most successful sires and dams of the century, both wire and smooth. An important feature of this volume of nearly 130 pages, is a Pedigree Chart.

Among many other chapters are those fully explaining the Show Game; Kennels and Kennel Management; Diseases; Training for Companionship and Sport. Kennel Club Standard and American Standard are clearly set out.

Guns



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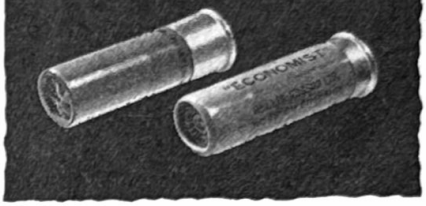

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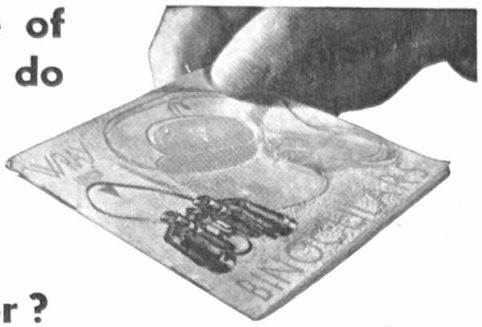

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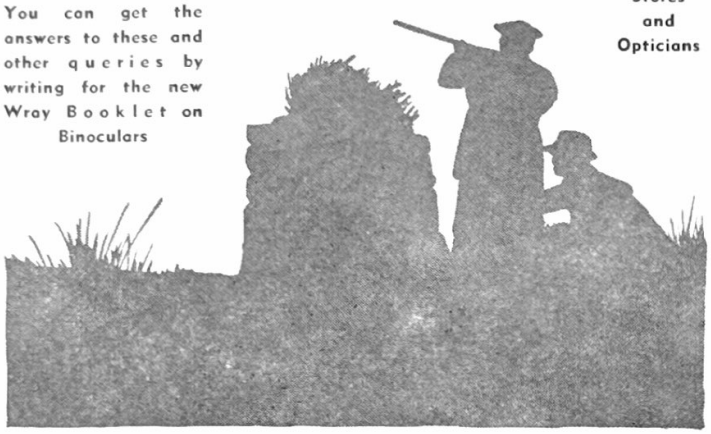

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

GAMEKEEPERS have excellent opportunities for training gundogs but I have frequently voiced the opinion that not all of them make full use of these opportunities. Providing that the keeper does not have to train and handle several dogs for his employer or employers, I see no reason why the average man should not be able to train up at least two or three good dogs each year—possibly more—which, if sold, would very handsomely augment his income.

A well-trained gundog of any breed will fetch something in the neighbourhood of £50 at, say, twelve to eighteen months of age, and a really first-class and experienced dog will command considerably more. In the case of most keepers, feeding will not raise a serious problem, and housing, if not already provided on the job, can be quite cheaply and efficiently constructed by anyone reasonably handy with carpenters' tools.

The trouble is, very often, that keepers are expected to look after much too great an acreage of ground, and consequently, believe that they have not enough time to concentrate upon dog training. However, I know several who manage to make good jobs of one or two dogs each year despite their obvious disadvantages as regards acreage, and all this is done in conjunction with the job, and does not interfere with keepering proper in the slightest. We also have the unfortunate fact that many gamekeepers are not conversant with efficient and modern methods of gundog training, or of a temperament unsuitable for the task of dog training. I have made myself unpopular among some of the keepering fraternity for expressing these views in the past, but they are undeniable facts which shooting men and the good dog men among keepers will readily confirm.

For some reason or another, a great many keepers seem to resent professional gundog trainers (and also other keepers who make a success of their dogs), and are for ever ready to make disparaging remarks about any dog belonging to one of their brethren which fails on a retrieve or which shows signs of unsteadiness. Indeed, I know of more than one keeper who never has a dog out on a shooting day, and these men are hottest critics of all of other peoples' dogs! I knew of at least one keeper—and a very good keeper, too—who *never* owned a gundog, although he generally had a terrier for vermin and rabbiting. This man was positively unbearable to other keepers, guns, or professional dog handlers who were present on a shooting day to pick-up. Anybody who had a gundog was the subject of sarcasm, criticism, and jealousy.

Resentment of Trainers

Why do some keepers resent professional trainers? I think it is because for many years the older school of keepers regarded dog training as one of their specialities (albeit many of them were hopeless at the job!) and considered that the professional could not possibly know anything about the job and that he was also taking the bread out of their mouths. Fortunately this attitude is gradually changing, and there are a vast number of keepers who are on good terms with professional trainers and work in conjunction with them. They are grateful for the help which can be given on shooting days, and are eager to co-operate in any way possible which, after all, can do them nothing but good. In this way quite a few keepers have become interested in trials or in gundog training as a sideline, and many of our present day professional handlers started life as keepers.

There are still some members of the older school about who delight in making sarcastic comments if and when a trainer's (or a gun's for that matter) dog runs in or fails to find, and with whom it is the hardest job possible to co-operate and obtain a day's picking-up. As I have said, with very few exceptions these types of keeper are hopeless at dog training and handling themselves, and are resentful of anyone who can do a job which they know full well they should succeed in.

Feeding dogs during a shooting lunch is not conducive to obedience and good behaviour.

Spirit of Co-operation

One gamekeeper friend of mine is a particularly clever gundog trainer, and I have bought trained dogs from him and have recommended him to many buyers, all of whom have been more than satisfied. This man is not above getting in the odd sarcastic comment or quip about my dogs from time to time, but they are offered (and accepted) in good spirit, and it is to the ultimate advantage of both of us to co-operate and work together, both on shooting days and at all other times when dog work or dog business is afoot. We are both the better for it—financially and socially—and I believe that we understand and respect each other's points of view, weaknesses and strong points. At any rate, we have not had a cross word in ten years or more. This is as it should be, and I should like to see the spirit of co-operation and friendship extended. It would do nobody any harm, and all concerned stand to gain by it.

Mention of this particular keeper brings to mind my recent remarks about us expecting too much of our dogs at too tender an age. This man has the happy knack of bringing his puppies on very early, and I attribute this to two main factors. The opportunities which he naturally has for dog training during the performance of his normal duties, and because he never has too many dogs on hand at one time. I have seen him out with an eight months' old puppy—indeed, I saw him with one only recently, a black labrador—which was as far advanced as many dogs of a year or more. It would face cover, retrieve quickly and stylishly, and withstand gunfire like an old one, and it was steadier than many second season dogs.

The Right Type of Dog

This is not an isolated instance, and it shows what can be done given the opportunities, an understanding of the canine mind, and concentration upon the *right type of dog* instead of trying to deal with too many at once. I will here add that my keeper friend is fussy and knows a good dog when he sees one and does not fall into the common error of using at stud the handiest and cheapest stud dog, or of buying in the cheapest market.

I have many times read, and more than once written, that in many cases the only person who really gets the best out of a gundog is the man who trained it. This is not always so, by any means, and I have trained more than one dog which has improved vastly after it has left my hands and has worked even better for the owner than it did for me. So much depends—in fact one might say *all* depends—upon the owner, his capacity for handling and ability to take pains and to concentrate upon the dog, especially after he has first got it home from the trainer. Far too many men still expect a dog to take to, and work for, them straight away without any preliminary work on their part. They take the dog out shooting much too soon after getting it home (the same or the next day not being unknown!), and are then surprised if it riots or refuses to work for them. Another common failing on the part of the owner of a trained dog is to concentrate upon his shooting instead of upon his dog the first few times he has it out.

This is fatal to training. If you want to get on top of a young, freshly trained dog after it returns from the trainer you must—repeat, *must*—concentrate upon it and let it know that you are doing so. Practically any young dog will riot the moment it gets the opportunity to do so with a strange handler, and unless this is nipped in the bud right away, money has been wasted.

To illustrate my point I should like to tell the story of a little springer spaniel which I have known from the time it was a raw puppy of about six months old. Impeccably bred from field trial parents, fast, stylish and willing to please, this puppy was trained for its owner by a friend of mine. After four or five months he could do practically anything with it. As steady as a rock, a super quester with a very good nose, and really stylish and slick in all its actions, this puppy was of field trial class. I shot over this dog in company with my friend and the owner on the day the latter took it over, and I was as envious as I could be. It was one of the few dogs that one sees that one would like to take home.

About six weeks later I was shooting on the same estate, the only other gun being the owner of the springer spaniel I write of. I have never seen such a sorry change in a dog in all my life. If ever a dog "made circles

round" its owner this one did. It chased, it ran in, it gave tongue when questing and, worst of all, refused to retrieve unless it saw that another dog was about to lift the game! It would run in, pick up the bird or rabbit, start back with it, put it down, toss it in the air, leave it, worry it—anything but retrieve it to hand. Later in the season, at a formal shoot, this dog was tethered to its owner and untied after each drive, when it made everything more difficult by picking up birds and moving them, but seldom, if ever, bringing them to hand.

The story is not quite complete. A few weeks ago I called to see my trainer friend, and there in his kennels I saw this springer spaniel. It appeared that the owner had left it whilst he went away on holiday, and my friend asked if I would like to see it out. I was very interested to do so, for it behaved even better than when I had seen it working for the trainer on the previous occasion. Even more stylish, a perfect retriever to hand, and absolutely steady and really slick on its commands.

I asked my friend how long he had had it back, and he told me three weeks, but that it had worked perfectly for him almost from the day it arrived. "Of course," he added, "it will be as bad as ever when he goes back to Mr. X, but what can you do about it? Nothing! He cannot handle a dog, never could, never will learn, and the poor wretched trainer gets the blame. It makes you sick, doesn't it?" With which sentiment I heartily concurred.

It is a strange fact that those men who have got dog sense and can handle dogs always seem to be the ones to seek knowledge and to find out all they can from the trainer. The very type which needs instruction, on the other hand, seem to take it for granted that they know all the answers, make few inquiries of the trainer, and do not take in what he does tell them. Little wonder that their dogs are not a success. Of course, the good handlers have become thus *because* they have taken pains to find out all about their dogs from the trainers, and because they have been honest enough to admit their limitations and lack of knowledge, and to do all they can to rectify them. I have no sympathy whatsoever for the man who is too lazy, too conceited or too ignorant to find out how to handle his dog. All my sympathy lies with the trainer who gets the blame for everything that goes wrong. For I know only too well the heartbreak of learning that a really worthwhile dog, of which one was justifiably proud, has been ruined through incompetent handling.

Difficult Time for Dog Breeders

This has been a difficult spring and summer for dog breeders, so it seems. I have known many cases where bitches have failed to conceive, although both they and the stud dogs have been in first-rate condition, and I have heard of cases of puppies dying for no apparent reason when a few days old. One lady recently told me of a litter of bull terriers which all died within a few days, developing the same symptoms of dropped shoulders and hard stomachs. One or more of the pups were send to the Veterinary College for post mortem, and though the experts there could tell the owner what had not caused the deaths, they were quite unable to diagnose the exact trouble, and it still remains a mystery.

In my own kennels, one labrador in a litter of five suddenly went off colour at about six weeks of age, and started refusing to eat solids. It would suckle and it would drink milk, but after taking a nibble of anything solid it just gave up, and rapidly lost condition. Worming did not seem to provide the answer, and the only possible solution seemed to be poisoning due to the use of an insecticidal powder which I had used to clear a louse infestation which occurred. None of the other pups was affected, and the patient is gradually improving and is quite lively and happy, and will in all probability make a complete recovery.

A litter of eight springers was doing well at a week old, when suddenly two developed very badly infected navels, and one had to be destroyed. The other one developed a secondary infection of one elbow, but fortunately a shot of penicillin, lancing and swabbing with a good germicide seemes to be having effect, and the pup is thriving. It never lost condition or stopped suckling—always a good sign—and I believe the trouble started because the dam was not cleaning them thoroughly.

Field Trials

The Yorkshire Gundog Club held a very successful pointer and setter trials on grouse at Nookton and Newbiggin Moors, near Blanchland, on July 22 and 23, the judges being Messrs. G. Abbott and A. Greenwell.

Awards. Open Stake: 1, Dr. J. B. Maurice's E. setter Downsman's Bracken; 2, The Hon. Mrs. E. V. Drummond of Cromlix's pointer Betty of Cromlix (A. McLauchlan); 3, Capt. W. Parlour's E. setter Sharnberry Nita; Reserve, Dr. and Mrs. Iwan Davies's E. setter Llanvapley Jester (Mr. White). Open Gordon Stake: No first prize; 2, Misses M. and A. Huntingdon's Riggside Rosette; 3, Mr. E. H. Waide's Highland Meg. Novice and Puppy Stake: 1, Mr. J. A. Robert's pointer Segontium Niblick; 2, Mr. T. Bishop's pointer Witherm Wagtail; 3, Capt. Parlour's E. setter Sharnberry Silver (J. Westgarth); Reserve, Capt. Parlour's E. setter Sharnberry Master (J. Westgarth).

* * *

The Irish Red Setter Club held successful field trials at Ballybofey, Co. Donegal, on July 25 and 26, when the judges were Messrs. Dermot Kelly and J. V. Courtney. The weather was very much against the dogs and handlers as there was no wind to help them, and the heat was, at times, terrific. However, many of the dogs stood up to it well and found their game nicely under very trying conditions.

Awards. Derby Stake: 1, Mr. M. Normayle's Fussey; 2, Mr. J. Nash's pointer Queen of Glenar; 3, Mr. W. Diffey's pointer Jiff of Newton. All-Age Stake: 1, Mr. J. Nash's red setter New Square Red Lassie; 2, Mr. A. Spiers' Irish setter bitch Sherry of Curacloe (Dr. T. Boyd); 3, Mr. L. Skehan's Irish setter Snuffles of Killone. International Allaged Stake: 1, Mr. T. McMenamin's Irish setter Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston); 2, Dr. T. Boyd's pointer Segontium Firefly; 3, Mr. A. A. Morrisey's pointer I.F.T.Ch. Talt of Mount Taafe (J. Cranston). Reserve, Mr. L. Skehan's Irish setter Snuffles of Killone.

* * *

The Ulster Irish Red Setter Club held trials on the Moors, outside Omagh, Co. Tyrone, on July 28 and 29, when the judges were Mr. P. Fletcher and Mr. D. Hanly.

Awards. Derby Stake: 1, Mr. T. Patterson's Irish setter Ballycooel (T. Robinson); 2, Mr. Normoyle's Irish setter Fussey. All-aged stake for Irish setters: Mr. T. Wilson's Rath-Right June; 2, Mr. McMenamin's Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston); 3, Mr. L. Skehan's Ruby. Reserve, Mr. Normoyle's Fussey. Grand All-aged stake: 1, Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston); 2, Mr. Normoyle's Irish setter Flush Royal; 3, Rev. Father Bannon's Llewellyn setter Seiglinde. Reserve, Major H. Filor's pointer Ballyhagan Tigger.

* * *

The Ulster Gundog League held trials at Carnalbanagh, Aughafatten, Co. Antrim, on July 30, when the judges were Messrs. W. McCoubrey and W. R. Gardiner.

Awards. Championship Open Stake: 1, Mr. G. Spence's Irish setter Red Bloom; 2, Mr. W. Kehone's Irish setter Judy of Killone; 3, Roscombe Red Grouse (J. Cranston). All-aged Novice Stake: 1, Mr. P. Fletcher's pointer Stooping Falcon; 2, Mr. E. Tosh's German pointer Dodger of Kells (J. Gray); 3, Mr. Tosh's German pointer Speccles of Hollybrook. Reserve, Mr. N. Rainey's setter dog Prince of Holmwood.

Grouse Prospects—1955

by David W. Hanton

ONCE again the Twelfth is with us, and once again I am sorry to say that the prospects are not too good. This "grouse business," I am sure, is rather a headache to many shooting people. Time after time their hopes are raised, only to be dashed to the ground by some unforeseen reason.

Last season was a rather poor one, and almost everywhere the moors were shot very lightly, and although stocks were low they appeared healthy. Last winter was rather severe, but not too bad to affect birds to any great extent

Perhaps the heavy snowstorms in the north of Scotland may have forced grouse to seek other quarters, but one generally finds that those birds soon find their way home once the thaw sets in. In this area (Angus), we had a very prolonged time of frost and snow, but in the past I have seen a greater quantity of snow many times and no bad after effects.

The worst of the weather took place in May (second week). Grouse were mostly sitting when the final blizzard hit them, out of the north east. In Moray, Banff, Nairn, and Inverness-shire it was particularly bad. Some moors had as much as 8in. and deeper where it had drifted. Ground over 1,500ft. has certainly bound to have been badly hit. It was even lying down to the edge of the Moray Firth where snow seldom ever lies. Our moors were not so badly off. We are situated on the southern side of the Grampian Range and that helped to break the force of the storm. All the same, the snow lay along the 1,500ft. line for a matter of two or three days. A few deserted nests have been found.

I expected that birds would be late, but they nested just about their usual time and young grouse appear to be mostly well grown. Coveys are not very large—I should say four to five. Here and there you find one up to about nine young birds. I think perhaps a few young ones have dropped off, as most nests hatched with few addled eggs left. I feel sure we are bound to have more young birds than last season.

The Vermin Menace

Vermin proved a menace for a time but we gradually got on top, and I do not think that a great amount of damage was done. All the same, I believe that the hoodie crow tends to increase in numbers every year. Despite every invention we can contrive, every spring produces a greater number of nests.

Stoats have been particularly savage this season, perhaps because of the shortage of rabbits to keep them satisfied. They had no alternative but to attack young birds. Should the rabbit disappear for good (which I doubt) the stoat may go, too. The rabbit has just about been wiped out with us, but there are a few odd ones left. Orders are to wipe them out entirely!

I went north as far as Ross-shire at Easter and the most of people I spoke to then were hopeful, but now they do not feel so good about things. I spent a few hours with a friend in Nairnshire, and walked for a short distance on the edge of his moor. I saw several pairs of grouse and one felt certain they would produce good coveys, but he tells me that he sees very few signs of young birds. This moor has felt the drought badly and perhaps they have moved to where they can get water. There has certainly been a great spell of fine weather, but water is in short

(Continued on next page, col. 2)

Turtle Doves

by I. Manley

On moving some hundred miles from one locality to another, I have been much struck by the differences in the bird populations of the two superficially fairly similar districts. One of the most attractive of the "new" birds to me is the turtle dove—a bird only rarely encountered in my old home, and then chiefly on migration, feeding with the woodpigeon on the harvested fields, but here so common that it is impossible in spring and summer to take a stroll without seeing or hearing a pair or two.

Compared to their cousins, the rock-, stock- and ring-doves they are tiny creatures, being little bigger than missel-thrushes. Their gentle cooing, softer, though more simply phrased, than that of the woodpigeon, and more musical than the stock dove's grunt, is one of the first sounds to be heard on June mornings and seems to continue intermittently throughout the day—the very voice of summer.

Gentle Courtship

They are tame, too, and one pair haunts the garden, flirting unselfconsciously in full view of the house. Sometimes the male and female, their pinkish breast feathers almost touching, sit close together on the cross-pole of a high trellis, turning from time to time to "kiss" one another as lovebirds do, or else the male bird sits a little apart, softly cooing to his mate and, at each coo, bowing low and bobbing his head. Sometimes they chase each other round and through the beach trees in the garden hedge, fluttering and "hooding" their wings and spreading their tail feathers into wide black and white fans.

The nest of this pair is some fifty yards from the house in a hawthorn tangle, partially overgrown with wild clematis. It is not more than twelve feet up and the few twigs which compose it seem, though they obviously are not, insufficient either to support the brooding birds or to prevent the two white eggs from falling to the ground. So far, they have even sufficed to conceal the eggs and young ones from the evil eyes of the ubiquitous magpies, and there is good hope that this brood and a second one too will be safely reared in time to undertake their hazardous autumn journey to southern Europe or North Africa.

Grouse Prospects — 1955

(Continued from previous page)

supply now. Many fires have done great damage to moorland and plantations. Grass and all herbage is so dry that a single spark would set the whole thing alight. People in charge of grouse ground alongside the railway have had to keep a constant watch. I cannot remember seeing the ground so dry.

Reports from Perthshire are more or less the same as elsewhere. Fairly good in some parts; poor in others. The high ground beyond Blair Atholl holds very few young birds. Even ptarmigan are seen in "flocks" which all points to damage by the late snowstorm. Dunkeld area has a fair report and expects to be better than last season.

Generally speaking high ground will be poor. Moors of medium height will be better than last year, but still short of having a good season and with coveys below average, and some broods will be late. Care will have to be taken not to overshoot.

In the Kitchen

By PENELOPE TURING

ONCE again the opening of the grouse shooting season heralds not only the possibilities of this one branch of sport, but all the anticipations, sporting and culinary, which are bound up with the beginning of the shooting man's year. I find that for the last few years I have devoted the cookery notes which appear on, or about, August 12, to grouse recipes, so having established a tradition, here are two more to maintain it.

Grouse Pie. Prepare a brace of grouse, removing the head and neck, feet and the ends of the wings, and cut them into neat joints. Then cut ¼lb. of steak into thin, small pieces and fry them lightly in butter or margarine. Take a large pie-dish, cover the bottom of it with 2oz. of fat bacon cut into small pieces, then put in the fried beef seasoned with pepper, salt, a little chopped parsley and shallot or onion. On this arrange the joints of grouse with more seasoning, then 2 hard-boiled eggs cut in slices, and finally another 2oz. of bacon cut small. Pour in some good game stock, cover with flaky or puff pastry leaving a hole in the centre, and bake in a good oven. Before serving scald and skin the feet and put them in the hole in the crust.

Braised Grouse. Put a good slice of fat bacon at the bottom of a stewpan and place the prepared grouse on this, with another rasher tied over the breast of each bird. Pour round them half a pint or more, according to the number of birds, of good stock, and simmer gently for about an hour, or until tender. Then take out the grouse and put them in a hot oven to crisp them slightly. Skim the fat off the gravy, add a little flour and butter to thicken it slightly, bring to the boil and cook for about 3 minutes. Strain a little of the gravy over the birds on a very hot dish and serve the rest separately. The gravy can be improved by adding a glassful of red wine.

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PUBLIC NOTICES

PROTECTION OF BIRDS ACT, 1954. The Secretary of State for the Home Department, having consulted the Advisory Committee for the Protection of Birds for England and Wales, proposes to make an order under section 3 (1) of the above act in respect of an area of sand about two and a half miles wide running west for about five miles from a point opposite Lytham Pier. The order would make the area a bird sanctuary in which no shooting of wild birds or taking of their eggs would be allowed throughout the year, except that certain "authorised persons" would be allowed to kill, or take the eggs of, any harmful birds named in the Second Schedule to the Act. The order would also remove an area lying to the north of the Southport Municipal Golf Links from the sanctuary established under article 5 of the Wild Birds Protection (County Borough of Southport) Order, 1946. A map showing the boundaries of the areas to which the proposed order would apply may be inspected on application at either the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Southport, or the Town Hall, Lytham St. Annes. Any person who wishes to submit any objections or representations about the proposed order should write not later than 20th August to the Under Secretary of State, Home Office, Whitehall, London, S.W.1

PROTECTION OF BIRDS ACT, 1954.—The Secretary of State for the Home Department, having consulted the Advisory Committee on the Protection of Birds for England and Wales, proposes to make an order under section 3 (1) of the above Act in respect of that part of the River Humber which is bounded on the east by a line drawn from Brough Haven to Whitton Ness Beacon, on the west by a line drawn from Faxfleet Ness Beacon through the Apex Lighthouse, and on the north and south by a line running 100 yards below and parallel with high water mark, or the edge of any shore vegetation growing continuously from and below high water mark, whichever is the lower line. The order would make the area a bird sanctuary and would: (1) prohibit the killing or taking of all wild birds throughout the year, except that certain "authorised persons" would be allowed to kill the harmful birds named in the Second Schedule to the Act; (2) prohibit any person other than representatives of certain bodies such as the Humber Conservancy Board from entering the area except by boat from 1st September to 20th February inclusive; and (3) provide that from 1st September to 20th February inclusive any person who killed or took a wild bird, or who (not being an exempted person) entered the area other than by boat would be liable to the special penalty prescribed by the Act (£25 or up to three months imprisonment, or both, in respect of each bird or each offence of entering the area). Any person who wishes to submit any objections or representations about the proposed order should write not later than 20th August to the Under Secretary of State, Home Office, Whitehall, London, S.W.1.

The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, with which is incorporated the British Sportsman, is published every Friday, price 1s. 3d., by The Burlington Publishing Company (1942) Ltd., 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. Printed by Bournemouth Times Ltd., Branksome, Bournemouth. Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper and for Canadian Magazine Post.

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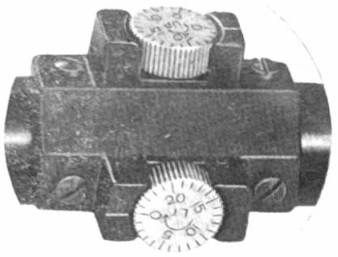

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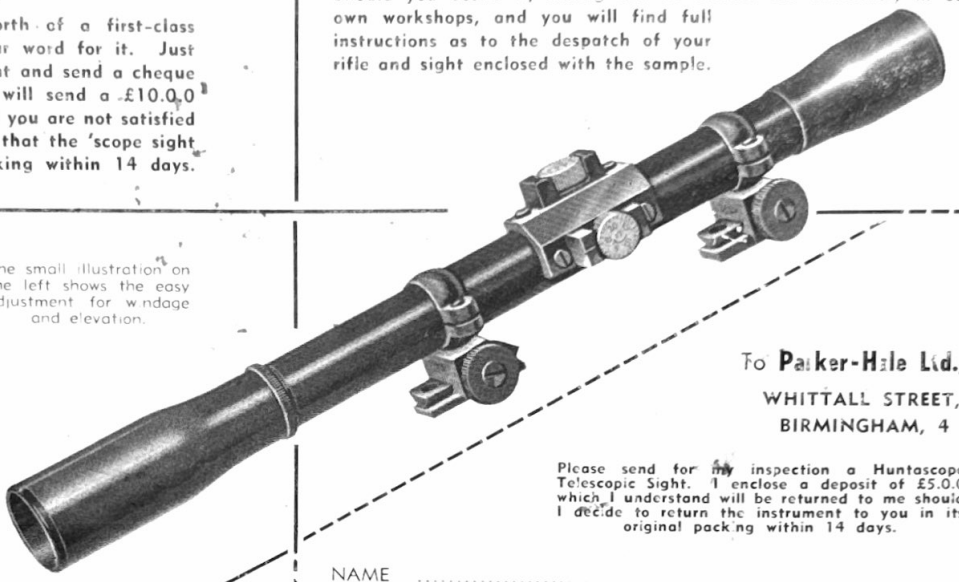

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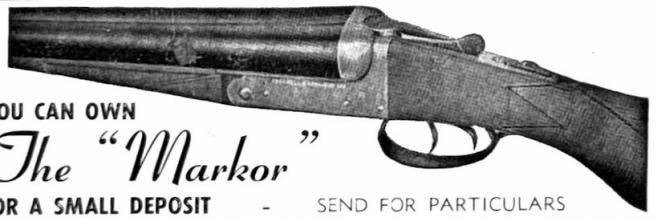

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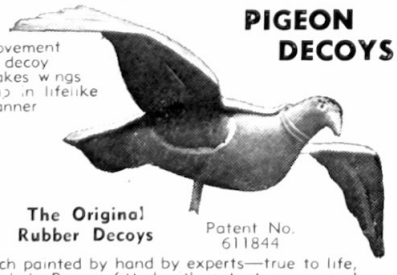

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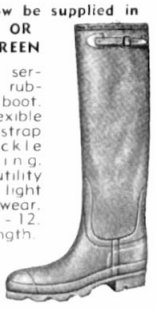

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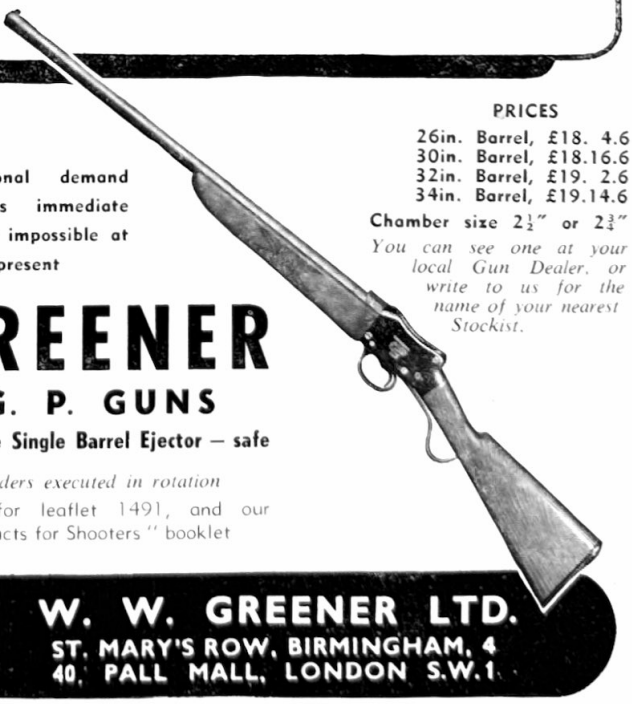

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